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Security Council

Seventieth year

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7490th meeting

Thursday, 23 July 2015, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. McCully/Mrs. Schwalger	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mr. Baublys
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim/Mrs. Adnin
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Norway, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: Mr. Carl Hallergard, Minister Counsellor in the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Let me begin by extending my warmest wishes to all of our Muslim colleagues and their families on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr and the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

In a region currently torn by religious radicalism, age-old sectarian rivalries and geopolitical realignments, one conflict has endured for over 65 years. Some see it as the core problem in the region; others dismiss it as unrelated to the current turmoil. Either way, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is increasingly entangled in the tectonic shifts of the Middle East. Given the region's massive transformation, it is imperative — perhaps more than ever before — that a permanent settlement be found, based on the concept of two States, Israel and a sovereign, contiguous and viable Palestine, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

Despite continuing security coordination in the West Bank, today the two sides are further apart from that goal than ever. Support for the two-State solution among both Palestinians and Israelis is fading away. The current situation on the ground is not sustainable, as the two-State solution continues to be under threat, including from settlement construction, security incidents, occupation-related violence and the lack of Palestinian unity. In the absence of a political process, the rise of violent extremism and terrorism in the region presents a danger as much to the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians for statehood as to the security of Israel.

In the current environment of mistrust, we in the international community must work with Israelis and Palestinians alike to create the conditions on the ground, regionally and internationally, that will facilitate a return to meaningful negotiations on the basis of an agreed framework and within a reasonable time frame. Both parties must undertake steps on the ground that demonstrate their continued commitment to a two-State solution, including through the implementation of existing agreements and by avoiding unilateral actions. Advancing the two-State solution requires a fundamental change in policy with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory. I welcome the recent decision by Israel to add 8,000 new work permits for Palestinians from the West Bank, bringing the number of permits issued for employment in Israel to a new high of approximately 60,000. That and other similar initiatives should be sustained and expanded, while much more needs to be done for improving the quality of life for Palestinians.

Unilateral actions in the West Bank — including settlement construction, so-called legalization of outposts, demolitions and evictions — must stop. While

settlement expansion has slowed of late, planning for related infrastructure has not ceased. I am concerned by recent reports about the imminent approval of new residential units in the occupied West Bank. Such a decision would inevitably damage the prospects for peace and increase the risk for political escalation. I urge the authorities to reconsider that action. Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the very essence of the viability of a future Palestinian State.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian people rightly expect their leaders to act to advance unity and empower their Government to take control of the border crossings in Gaza, implement civil service integration, pay public-sector salaries and ensure that the governance framework between the West Bank and Gaza is integrated under a single authority. Those efforts will pave the way for much-delayed elections to take place.

I call on all Palestinian groups to avoid in-fighting and find common ground on the basis of nonviolence and reconciliation in order to achieve national unity, which is critical for the two-State solution. The Secretary-General stands ready to work with the Security Council and with our partners in the Middle East Quartet on a reinvigorated effort to create the conditions for the return to meaningful negotiations. In that context, I note the proposed establishment of an international support group that could contribute to such efforts. In the past month, as part of an active outreach effort, Quartet envoys engaged constructively with Egypt, Jordan and the League of Arab States. I take this opportunity to encourage the leadership of Israel to endorse the Arab Peace Initiative as an important contribution to a resolution of the conflict.

The date of 8 July marked the one-year anniversary of the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas. Gaza's painstaking emergence from last summer's conflict is undermining belief among the population that genuine progress can be achieved. The activities of Salafi jihadists and other extremist groups are a cause for concern, not only in Gaza but also in neighbouring Sinai, where there are reports of their active support of militants on the Egyptian side of the border.

On 18 July, six cars were blown up in Gaza City. Palestinian Salafist militants launched a rocket at Israel on 16 July, which exploded in an open area near Ashkelon. In response, Israel conducted four airstrikes against militant infrastructure targets in Gaza. Militants also fired a rocket from the Sinai on 3 July, which landed in Israel close to the Egyptian border. All of that highlights the potential for violence to expand beyond the borders of the Sinai.

The Secretary-General calls upon all actors in Gaza to provide information as to the possible whereabouts and conditions of two Israeli civilians who entered Gaza sometime over the past year and remain unaccounted for, as well as to take prompt action to facilitate their safe return to their families.

Those, and other incidents, underscore the fragile dynamics within Gaza that, without positive change, will continue to provide fertile ground for extremism to flourish.

Last month, the Palestinian Authority and Israel reached a welcome agreement on a new mechanism to allow Palestinians in Gaza access to needed construction material for the reconstruction of fully destroyed homes and for new construction. Close to 700 families have already been cleared, and over 120 of them have purchased the required construction materials. Given that development, I take this opportunity to once again urge donors to fulfil their pledges, in particular those allocated to housing construction and to addressing Gaza's urgent energy and water needs.

I also welcome the recent agreement to install an additional scanner for containers at the Kerem Shalom crossing. That should enable a substantial increase in exports from, and imports into, Gaza.

The lifting of the Gaza closures within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009) remains an important objective for the United Nations. Absent that, the United Nations continues to work with Israeli and Palestinian authorities to support vital efforts to rebuild the lives of people in Gaza.

Turning to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while the frequency of security incidents decreased as compared with last month, the situation remained tense. Israeli security forces conducted some 186 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrest of some 300 Palestinians. Meanwhile, Palestinian security forces also arrested more than 100 people in the West Bank. I continue to be concerned by the situation of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel, including those on hunger strike. All those held in administrative detention should be promptly charged and tried in a court of law, or released without delay.

In total, during the reporting period 50 Palestinians were injured and four were shot and killed by Israeli

security forces, including two at checkpoints near Nablus and Ramallah. Two members of the Israeli security forces were stabbed and injured, one seriously. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli civilians in the West Bank also continued, resulting in the death of one Israeli and injury to eight Israelis and nine Palestinians, including one child.

Just as such incidents contribute to the lack of hope and anger, which feed a continuing cycle of violence and highlight the imperative to seek a resolution to the conflict, so too do the demolitions and displacement in the West Bank. On 12 July, Israel announced that it would seek to execute demolition orders of structures in the Palestinian village of Susiya, in Area C. That comes ahead of a hearing scheduled for 3 August on a directly related planning-approval process. The Secretary-General joins the United States and the European Union in expressing deep concern about the demolition and displacement plans for Susiya. My Deputy Special Coordinator visited the community earlier today. We hope that the ongoing dialogue between the authorities and the herding community will protect the rights of the persons affected.

Against that backdrop, intra-Palestinian talks to form a national unity Government have faltered. I note the efforts of President Abbas and Prime Minister Hamdallah to reshuffle the current Government, and call on them to proceed without delay to appointing the new ministers. The reshuffling comes at a particularly sensitive time, as the Palestinian Authority faces significant financial challenges — including a 2015 budget deficit of approximately $500 million in 2015. That gap cannot be closed through fiscal measures alone, and I urge donors to rapidly scale up their direct budget support. In that respect, it is also important to revive the functioning of the Israeli-Palestinian joint economic committee.

While it is first and foremost up to the Palestinian authorities to take the lead, the United Nations stands ready to support the President, the Government and all factions in their efforts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza, in line with the intra-Palestinian unity agreement of 23 April 2014. Palestine is one, and the United Nations will work determinedly to advance unity through its legitimate institutions.

Allow me to briefly turn to the rest of the region and to note that the United Nations broad engagement continued during the reporting period. Following consultations with Syrian, regional and international parties, next week the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will brief the Security Council on their recommendations for moving the political track forward.

In Yemen, Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed is extending his good offices to all parties to restart negotiations on a political transition.

In Libya, the United Nations remains engaged in facilitating talks aimed at ending the current political and security crisis through the formation of a Government of national accord.

In Iraq, the United Nations is working to promote political dialogue in the hopes of encouraging national reconciliation.

In Lebanon, concerns are growing that political differences are preventing the effective functioning of State institutions, despite Prime Minister Salam's commendable efforts to run the Government. There has been no progress in efforts to end the presidential vacuum. The Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, continues to urge Lebanon's leaders to put the country's stability and national interests ahead of partisan politics and elect a President without further delay.

Meanwhile, the situation along the Lebanese border with Syria has remained stable, with the Lebanese Armed Forces continuing their operations to prevent the infiltration of armed extremist groups from Syria. In the south, the situation along the Blue Line has remained generally calm, despite almost daily Israeli overflights over Lebanese territory. We encourage both parties to continue to make effective use of the liaison and coordination mechanisms of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

I am deeply concerned about the current unprecedented financial crisis at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). If the current $100 million gap is not closed in the next weeks, there is a serious risk that UNRWA schools — which educate 500,000 children throughout the Middle East — will not open. That will have grave implications for Palestinian refugee children in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and for the stability and security of a region already in turmoil. I urge donors to step up support for UNRWA at this critical time.

Let me return to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to reiterate our collective resolve to prevent a further deterioration of the situation, to uphold the two-State solution and to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations. Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas recently spoke and reaffirmed their desire for peace. That is a welcome sign, but words need to be translated into concrete and sustained actions on the ground.

Let me also be abundantly clear: measures undertaken to improve the situation must not be considered an end unto themselves, but part of a broader political framework with the goal of achieving a final-status agreement. Now is the time to act decisively to reverse the growing perception that the two-State solution is on life support and that it is slowly dying a death by a thousand cuts.

A comprehensive agreement will require committed engagement with key Arab States, including through the Arab Peace Initiative. The Secretary-General stands ready to support both sides in order to overcome their divisions and to rise to the challenge of forging a path forward towards a peaceful future.

In conclusion, let me place on record my deep appreciation for the support that the Security Council and the Secretariat have given on the ground to the excellent team of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Robert Piper of Australia as the new Deputy Special Coordinator, who will also serve as the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for a very comprehensive, clear and constructive briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate New Zealand on its presidency of the Security Council and I thank you, Minister for Foreign Affairs McCully, for presiding over this important debate, which is a reflection of his country's responsible, principled position vis-à-vis this issue and its commitment to uphold the Security Council's mandate to contribute to international peace and security.

We also reiterate our deep appreciation to the delegation of Malaysia for its skilled leadership of the Council in June, including the critical debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.7463), and also express our appreciation for Malaysia's efforts as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on that topic. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing and his initial efforts in his important post. We reaffirm our support for his mandate, as well as our readiness to continue cooperation towards the fulfilment of our common objectives, foremost among them being to secure a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Regrettably, we are no closer to that peace today than we were when we met in the Chamber a year ago (see S/PV.7222), when my delegation appealed desperately for the Council's intervention to halt Israel's slaughter of innocent Palestinian children, women and men and the wanton destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and vital civilian infrastructure, which terrorized and traumatized the entire civilian population in the Gaza Strip and left hundreds of thousands of lives and entire communities shattered and in ruins. On this day, 23 July, a year ago, we informed the Council that the death toll from Israel's aggression had already reached 660 Palestinians and was rising. We alerted the Council to the shocking fact that, even at that stage, two weeks into the Israeli offensive, one third of the casualties were children, more than half of them under 12 years old, which exposed the brutality of the occupying force and the false Israeli claims about respect for civilian lives and international humanitarian law.

Those facts were later corroborated by the Independent Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Human Rights Council and by the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), which confirmed that by the end of Israel's assault on Gaza the occupying forces had killed at least 551 children, ranging from week-old babies to 17-year-olds, and killed 299 women among the more than 2,251 Palestinians killed, the majority civilians. The reports also confirmed that over 11,000 Palestinians were injured, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children, with injuries so severe owing to the lethal weaponry and wide-impact explosives used by Israel that an estimated 10 per cent of the injured civilians will suffer life-long disabilities. The Independent Commission of Inquiry also found that Israel persisted with its onslaught even after early knowledge of the high casualty figures, indicating a deliberate decision on the part of the Israeli

Government and military officials to inflict such harm, a fact also confirmed by the testimonies of numerous Israeli soldiers instructed to kill without mercy anyone they encountered in Gaza — man, woman or child.

Despite those facts, our pleas to the Council were to no avail. One year since the horrific devastation mercilessly and deliberately inflicted on Gaza by Israel, the occupying Power, not a single Israeli official or soldier has been held accountable for those crimes, committed so wantonly before the eyes of the world, the vast human and physical wounds remain unhealed, and hopes are rapidly fading for any relief from that appalling injustice.

Families remain traumatized by that indescribable loss, including 1,500 children orphaned by the killing of their mothers and fathers, and more than 110,000 people remain homeless, forcibly displaced by Israel's massive destruction of homes, and dependent on aid for their survival. As Israel's blockade continues in collective punishment of Gaza's 1.8 million Palestinians and continues to obstruct reconstruction and recovery, humanitarian conditions are worsening beyond measure, as unemployment and food insecurity are rising to unprecedented levels and become ever more difficult to alleviate as donor support becomes harder to secure. At this time, I must draw attention to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to at least 70 per cent of Gaza's population, the majority of whom are Palestine refugees. The Agency now faces the most severe funding crisis since it began operations, 65 years ago, threatening not only its vital services in Palestine but also in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan at a precarious time in the region. We appeal for international support for UNRWA's essential humanitarian work and stabilizing presence as a matter of urgency, and we appeal to the United Nations to act immediately to address the crisis.

While Gaza is being suffocated and dehumanized, the rest of occupied Palestine continues to be ravaged by Israel's vicious settlement campaign, settler terror and repression, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of Israeli settlements, the wall and related infrastructure persist, in grave breach of international law, in violation of Security Council resolutions, and in flagrant disrespect of the authoritative International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* (see A/ES-10/273), handed down 11 years ago. The dire situation now faced by Palestinians in Khirbet Susiya in the southern hills of Al-Khalil, who are being threatened with the destruction of their entire community and forced displacement, as extremist settlers and illegal settlements further encroach on their land and rights, as well as the plans for the forced transfer of thousands of Palestinian Bedouins from areas in and around occupied East Jerusalem, are just two examples of that rabid Israeli colonization.

The Israeli occupying forces also continue to cause civilian casualties through military raids and attacks on protesters. The killing of 17-year-old Mohammed Al-Kasbah, who was shot by Israeli soldiers in early July at the Qalandiya checkpoint, brought unbearable tragedy to yet another Palestinian family, this time to a family that had already lost two of their other young sons, Samer, age 15, and Yasser, age 11, to the brutality of the occupation. Moreover, not a single day passes where Palestinian civilians are not intimidated, arrested and detained, including children, adding to the nearly 6,000 illegally imprisoned by Israel under inhumane conditions and subjected to constant abuse and torture. The plight of our prisoners and detainees has again been highlighted by the 55-day hunger strike of Khader Adnan, who was recently released from detention, only to be detained immediately after his release in a vulgar display of Israel's total control of every aspect of Palestinian life.

Israel launched its war in the summer of 2014 and, bearing in mind all the illegal actions perpetrated thereafter, it had intentionally aimed to sabotage the prospects for peace, by intensifying its collective punishment of the Palestinian people and stripping them of any hope for an end to the cruel occupation and for the realization of their inalienable rights and national aspirations.

That is why — despite the global calls for a just solution based on two States within the pre-1967 borders, despite the historic compromise made by the Palestinian leadership more than a quarter of a century ago, despite over two decades of negotiations and despite the passage of more than 48 years since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967) — the dangerous political impasse continues and peace remains elusive. That is the direct outcome of Israel's illegal, combative behaviour, by which it continues to deny the Palestinian people their rights and to entrench its occupation in violation of international law and all norms of morality

and decency. It is also a direct outcome of the Israeli Government's rejection of peace and its bad faith and obstruction of all attempts to revive negotiations based on clear and credible parameters rooted in Security Council resolutions. In reality, it has not only undermined the efforts to salvage the two-State solution but is actively destroying it.

As a result, the humanitarian and security situation continues on a downward spiral and tensions continue to rise, threatening total destabilization, which we have repeatedly drawn the Council's attention to, in vain. As the region experiences unprecedented turmoil and extremism, imperiling entire States and endangering international peace and security, we reiterate that continuing destabilization poses grave risks that must be averted. Human lives must be saved and the potential of peace be restored.

While some believe that regional crises necessitate turning away from Palestine to focus on other matters, many also believe that solving the conflict now is imperative for the future of the Middle East and beyond. The latter rightly believes that a just, peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — would open doors for a new era in the region — one of stability, cooperation and collective action for our common goals and also our common problems. The promise of the Arab Peace Initiative, one of the most important peace initiatives the region has ever witnessed, is at the centre of that belief. Regrettably, that Initiative has never been reciprocated by Israel, which has continued to distort and reject it.

Yet the State of Palestine remains committed to the pursuit of peace, committed to international law, as reflected in our decision to accede to the core humanitarian and human rights law instruments, as well as to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and committed to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, whose resolutions we uphold and for which we seek respect.

We insist that a just peace is the only remedy for the conflict and the violence, deprivation and instability it engenders. We firmly reject claims that "now is not the right time" for a solution. The time is actually long overdue.

In 2015, as we witness the distress and instability in Palestine and the region as a whole, we do not have the luxury to continue delaying peace. The Palestinian people can no longer delay realization of their fundamental human rights, which they have been so wrongly denied, nor accept rationales asking them to endure further violations, suffering and indignities, while the occupying Power is placated and appeased, not even held accountable for its most egregious crimes.

Palestine seeks peace and coexistence with Israel, but that must be based on freedom and justice. That requires a complete end to the foreign occupation and the colonial, racist policies that have fueled it for nearly half a century. International law and human rights, not military might and violence, must be the core of that peace. Interim solutions or other palliatives to ease or manage the situation will not suffice. The plight of the Palestinian people — from occupied Palestine to our refugee camps in the region and especially in Syria, where that catastrophic conflict has brought death, destruction, starvation and displacement to Palestinian refugees along with the Syrian people who are suffering so gravely — is an existential crisis that urgently demands a just solution.

We therefore reiterate our call on the Security Council to uphold its Charter duties and to act now to adopt a resolution aimed at breaking the political impasse and ushering in the achievement of lasting peace and security. In that regard, we continue to welcome and support the French initiative and call on Council members to move forward now on reaffirming the parameters for peace, based on the internationally recognized terms of reference enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as on a clear time frame for an end to the Israeli occupation, with international monitoring and support for the implementation of a peace agreement.

The foundations for peace must be firmly set before this opportunity is lost to us and the two-State solution is relegated to the archives of history. Israel must be compelled to cease all of its illegal policies and measures, whether the blockade or aggression against Gaza, or the colonization and de facto annexation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, all must be halted and compliance with the law must be demanded.

Also, Israel must be held responsible for its crimes. We recall here the Independent Commission of Inquiry's findings on actions triggering criminal liability by Israeli occupying forces, commanders and Government leaders and the imperative of accountability. Peace and

accountability are not mutually exclusive; both can and must be pursued, for impunity will always obstruct peace and peace cannot exist without justice.

The Security Council should heed the global calls to fulfil its responsibilities, which were echoed in the appeals made to Council members during the 20 July Arria Formula meeting on the Gaza crisis, which was co-chaired by Malaysia and Jordan and was the first Arria Formula meeting on Palestine since 1997. That meeting highlighted voices from the ground and calls for redress of the unsustainable situation in Gaza, underscoring that this crisis and underlying issues must be addressed immediately to avert another explosion and must be addressed as an integral part of the overall efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We note that we recognize the necessity for Palestinian unity and assure the Council of our ongoing efforts to achieve reconciliation and empower the national consensus Government to fulfil its duties.

Significantly, the Arria Formula meeting also reaffirmed the universal view that a continued failure to achieve a just solution and the continued denial of Palestinian rights, including of Palestine's rightful place among the community of nations, have severely undermined international law and the international system itself, including the credibility of the Security Council. We therefore appeal again to the Council and the international community to uphold the rule of law and find the political will to achieve peace and to make it a living reality that will finally bring relief to our long-suffering people, the region and the global community.

Despite so many failures and setbacks, the Palestinian people still look to the Security Council to act with conscience to contribute to the attainment of peace and the realization of their rights, including to independence in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders, stressing that the Palestinian demand for freedom is non-negotiable and is a prerequisite for lasting peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): I should first like to congratulate New Zealand for its able stewardship of the Security Council this month. I thank Foreign Minister McCully for being here today to preside over this meeting, and I also wish to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing today and his ongoing efforts to help ease the situation in this volatile region.

Ten years ago this month, Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip, and I would like to remind the Council that we also dismantled four settlements in the West Bank in order to show that there is a political horizon. We removed thousands of Israeli families from their homes, uprooted entire communities and withdrew every unit of the Israeli Defence Forces. Not a single Israeli civilian or soldier remained in Gaza.

We in Israel have always been told, including in this prestigious Chamber, that the obstacles to peace are the settlements and the Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria. If only Israel would pull back, if only Israel would leave the Palestinians to run their own affairs, there would be peace. If Israel would only listen to the international community, the border between Israel and the Palestinians would be like the border between the Netherlands and Belgium.

So we did.

Ten years after we withdrew from Gaza, the territory we left has become a safe haven for terrorists. Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization, has used and abused the people of Gaza to continue its war against Israel. Apparently it did not get the memo that an Israeli withdrawal was supposed to end the jihad against its people. Since the disengagement, terrorist groups have fired 15,000 rockets and mortars at Israeli citizens. They have dug terror tunnels underneath the border to attack Israeli towns and communities.

Yet, despite all of this, When Hamas joined the Palestine Liberation Organization Government, the UN gave its warm blessing. When Hamas refused to adopt the Quartet principles and refused to recognize Israel's right to exist, the Council looked the other way. And just recently, when Israel revealed to the world that senior Hamas members Abdullah Kishta and Wa'al Faraj collaborated with the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) in northern Sinai to carry out a large-scale attack on Egyptian military bases, not a single voice of condemnation was heard from this Chamber.

To this day, Hamas refuses to accept the three conditions of the international Quartet. It refuses to recognize Israel, it refuses to abide by previous agreements, and, obviously, it refuses to renounce

violence. The Quartet, not Israel, established these conditions, and Hamas flouts them.

Gaza was supposed to be a model of a stable, self-governing society. Instead, it became the model for lawlessness, violence and destabilization. Gaza was supposed to be the pilot project for Palestinian governance in the West Bank, but the pilot crashed the plane.

Since then, a similar model has proliferated all over the Middle East. From the Mediterranean to the Caspian, States that we knew yesterday are no longer here today, and others are on the verge of disappearing tomorrow. We live in a time in which nation States are disintegrating before our eyes. New political structures have not been established, and bands of religious zealots are rushing in to create new theocratic States in this vacuum.

Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya no longer exist as we knew them. Now we have the kingdom of Al-Qaida, the republic of Jabhat Al-Nusra, Houthistan and, of course, the Islamic State. This is not the Middle East we learned about from our high-school geography teachers; those borders are now unrecognizable. The Google map of the region must be updated every day based on which terror group seized control of which area during the previous night.

In the Sinai peninsula, terrorists have declared war on Egypt. Earlier this month, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, an ISIS branch in Egypt, carried out an attack on 15 Egyptian military positions in northern Sinai, killing more than 70 Egyptians. Let it be clear: these groups are not only looking to terrorize Egyptians, they are trying to destabilize the entire region.

These emerging radical factions differ in their ideologies, in their interests and in their goals, but they all share one thing in common: they seek to impose their radical religious beliefs on all who come under their control. In the new lawless Middle East, there is only one law — submit or die — and sometimes you are not even given the choice.

A butterfly flutters its wings in one place and causes a storm halfway around the world. When the earth shakes in the Middle East, you can feel the vibrations under your feet from Europe to Asia. In one day last month, we witnessed terror attacks on three continents — a day of bloodshed during which terrorists murdered 65 innocent people in Tunisia, in Kuwait and in France.

Many in the international community were captive to their dreams of a new Middle East, but we can no longer just hit the snooze button. It is time to wake up. We are, all of us, engaged in a large-scale war over the future of the Middle East and the rest of the world. What will our region look like? Will it progress to an era of democracy and human rights or regress to a collection of fundamentalist States? Which countries will remain standing? Will it be the countries we have known for a century? Or will much of the Middle East become known simply as the United Islamic Empire? The trends are against us. If we do not wake up in time, we will get all the answers wrong.

Israel does not have the luxury of waiting for the rest of the world to wake up. Before the West had to deal with the Islamic State halfway around the world, Israel had to deal with the Hamas terror State on our doorstep. It is now exactly one year since Operation Protective Edge. One year ago, Israel was forced to protect its people after Hamas terrorists kidnapped and killed three Israeli youths, launched hundreds of rockets and mortars at Israel, and rejected or violated every truce offered to the parties.

The Israeli Defence Forces faced a cruel and cynical enemy that knows no red lines and that has violated every code of morality the civilized world holds dear. Hamas launched its indiscriminate attacks from residential areas that it had turned into military staging grounds. Hospitals, schools and United Nations facilities were used as weapons depots, playgrounds were used as launching pads, and innocent children were used as human shields. Firing rockets on civilians from behind civilians is a double war crime, and the international community should say so loud and clear.

While the rockets constituted terror from above, Hamas also sought to unleash terror from below. In Gaza, there is no money to rebuild hospitals or to pay teachers, but there is a lot of money to dig and expand terror tunnels. When Hamas finishes its work, Gaza will be the first city in the world to have a modern infrastructure underground before having a basic infrastructure aboveground.

As we sit here today, one year after last summer's conflict, we must ask: what has really changed? We can start answering the question by looking at the Hamas military parade in Gaza this month, where Hamas publicly displayed two newly developed rockets. For anyone who did not get the message, Hamas explained that "until now the enemy has only seen a small part

of our true power". Hamas has intensified its efforts to repair its network of terror tunnels and smuggle, stockpile and develop new weapons.

A year after the operation, the United Nations has done nothing to weaken Hamas, but plenty to criticize Israel. Two weeks ago, the United Nations Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry published its report on last summer's conflict. Let me give the Council an example of how professional, insightful and thorough this report was. The authors of the report said,

> "The Commission cannot conclusively determine the intent of Palestinian armed groups with regard to the construction and use of these tunnels."

Would I have a suggestion? Maybe these tunnels were intended to be the new metro system in Gaza. In that case, as the previous Ambassador to the Court of St. James, I give Council members a tip: do not forget to mind the gap. Perhaps the United Nations is simply suffering from a severe case of tunnel vision. After all, this is the same United Nations that appointed as the head of the Commission William Schabas, the law professor who conveniently forgot to mention his prior paid consulting job with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

I am holding in my hands a 200-page-long Israeli report that details the systematic and widespread atrocities committed by Hamas and analyses Israel's military response. If someone at the United Nations had read this report, he or she would have had a broader perspective on the threat Israel faces and recognized Hamas for what it really is — an internationally recognized terrorist organization. When Palestinians in the Yarmouk refugee camp were massacred by ISIS and the Secretary-General said, "the refugee camp is beginning to resemble a death camp", we did not hear any call for a commission of inquiry from the Human Rights Council.

The United Nations prides itself on taking a balanced approach to international affairs. That is very interesting. Saudi Arabia has for months been carrying out massive and indiscriminate air strikes in Yemen. Those strikes have hit United Nations facilities, hospitals, schools and civilian neighbourhoods and left entire families dead, yet — surprise, surprise — no commission of inquiry, no board of inquiry. This is the same United Nations that made it clear to us — Israel — that it is standard operating procedure to automatically establish a board of inquiry any time a United Nations facility is hit.

That is a balanced approach indeed. When it comes to investigating the results of war and conflict, it seems the United Nations believes, to paraphrase George Orwell, that all people are equal, but some people are more equal than others.

Israel's struggle against the Hamas rulers of Gaza does not prevent us from playing a key role in helping the people of Gaza. Hundreds of trucks enter Gaza every day, carrying thousands of tons of food, humanitarian aid, medicine and more, all without restrictions. Since October 2014, Israel has supplied Gaza with 1.3 million tons of construction material.

While Israel is fully committed to the implementation of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism and will continue to cooperate with the United Nations in this important mission, the Palestinian Authority (PA) not only refrains from taking part in the effort, but it puts obstacles in the way of those who do so. The PA is quick to condemn Israel at the United Nations, but on the ground it refuses to assume responsibility for the people of Gaza. The Palestinian Authority has no authority over the Gaza Strip, and apparently it does not want any.

Last September, the Security Council tried to adopt a draft resolution to address the situation in Gaza. While Israel agreed to the draft resolution, the Palestinian President dragged his feet, obstructed the process and eventually rejected the proposition altogether. The draft resolution would have restored PA governance over the people of Gaza, granted the PA control over the crossings into Gaza and disarmed Hamas. The draft resolution would have given control over Gaza back to the PA, but Mahmoud Abbas rejected it.

The Palestinian leadership is apparently too busy settling scores with political rivals in the PA to worry about what happens in Gaza. Just look at how Abbas treated the former Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salaam Fayyad — a Palestinian leader esteemed and respected in the international community. Abbas seized the funds of Fayyad's non-governmental organization, Tomorrow for Social Development, and froze his accounts. The Palestinian Authority never misses an opportunity to avoid responsibility. The international community should not shy away from criticizing the PA and pushing it to assume responsibility.

Avoiding responsibility has its price. Last month, there were numerous terror attacks, including two that

were fatal. Dani Gonen and Malachi Rosenfeld were shot and killed by Palestinian terrorists as they went about their daily lives. May their memory be a blessing. Those murderous attacks are just part of an increase in the terror attacks we have witnessed recently. Yet the leadership of the PA remains silent and fails to condemn the murder of innocent people.

Three days ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 2231 (2015), which endorses the nuclear agreement with Iran. The agreement is bad for Israel, bad for the region, and bad for the world. It is a historic mistake that brings Iran closer to achieving its 30-year goal of attaining nuclear weapons and fuels its drive for imperial expansion. The resolution took the first step to lift the sanctions without waiting to see if Iran complies with even one single obligation in the agreement.

What makes the international community so sure that Iran will live up to its end of the bargain? When the nuclear deal was struck with North Korea, good and well-intentioned people believed that it would prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. Sometimes, good intentions lead to wishful thinking.

Iran is the source of instability in the Middle East. In Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and other countries, Iran has deployed its Revolutionary Guards in order to expand its empire. Iran is also the godfather of terror around the world. Countries from Bulgaria to Argentina have experienced the horror of Iranian terror at first hand. For years, Iran has armed and financed Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza — two groups that make clear their goal of wiping Israel off the map.

Many members of the Security Council described the agreement as the opening of a new chapter. I am sorry to ruin a good book, but Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has a different story to tell. Council members may have signed a deal with the poster boys of Iran — Zarif and Rouhani — but in Iran the Ayatollah and his Revolutionary Guards are the ones calling the shots. Khamenei declared that even after the agreement is signed, Iran will continue to support terrorists in the Middle East and around the world. If that was not clear enough, listen to what Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister had to say two days ago:

> "We have told the P5+1 ... that we will supply arms to anyone and anywhere ... and will import weapons from anywhere we want ... we clarified this point during the negotiations."

It is worth noting the fact that Israel and many States in the Arab world share grave concerns over the implications of the agreement on the stability of the Middle East. When Israel and the Arab world share the same concerns, the world should pay attention. Instead of contributing to a solution in our region, this agreement has strengthened the source of the problem; it has given the source of the problem, Iran, the money to act on the basis of its destructive ideology and the time and opportunity to develop a nuclear arsenal. The agreement grants Iran not one, but two paths to the bomb: it can acquire the bomb by cheating, or by keeping the deal for 10 years, and then assembling its bomb immediately. And 10 years go by in the blink of an eye.

Under the terms of the agreement, Iran may continue significant enrichment not needed for civilian use, as well as continue research and development on advanced centrifuges that will significantly reduce the break-out time for a bomb. Enforcement is largely dependent on Iran's goodwill: inspections are not "anywhere, any time". The deal gives Iran the ability to delay inspections of undeclared sites for 24 days — enough time to hide a smoking gun; and there are insufficient limitations on Iran's weaponization activities. Iran already has the enrichment capability to produce a bomb and the means for suitable delivery: without limitations on weaponization, the way is paved for Iran to assemble a bomb.

Now, in the summer of 2015, the countdown to Iran's becoming a threshold nuclear State has begun. In five years, the embargo against conventional weapons will end. In eight years, it can acquire missile technology; in 10 years, unlimited centrifuges. That is not disarmament. It is a timetable for Iran to build nuclear weapons. In future years, the consequences of that mistake will become clear to everyone, but for Israel tomorrow is already too late.

Ten years ago, Israel took a significant step with its disengagement from Gaza. A decade later, in the light of regional developments, the international community must take steps of its own. It must disengage from illusions, from its constant bias against Israel and from murderous terror groups. The time has come to disengage from old habits, but engage with the values that we all cherish.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand.

Right across the Middle East, grave issues continue to demand the Council's attention. The humanitarian situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate. The civil war in Syria rages on. In Iraq, sectarian divides provide space for groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to prosper. A basis for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians remains elusive.

Against that difficult background, this week is also an apt moment to reflect on positive developments in the region. The Security Council's adoption of resolution 2231 (2015), on Monday, following years of negotiation among the permanent, the European Union and Germany and Iran, represents a major victory for diplomacy. While much work remains to implement the agreement, and even more to build sustained trust between Iran and the international community, reaching an agreement at all represents a huge achievement. Great credit is due to those most directly involved. The parties' willingness to commit to political solutions and exercise political courage in the face of significant challenges lies at the heart of that diplomatic achievement.

The question now is whether the same political courage and commitment can be brought to bear on finding political solutions to the other issues afflicting the region. Can stakeholders cooperate to end the conflicts in Syria, Iraq or Yemen, or to create a pathway towards a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine? I believe the answers must be, "Yes". But the burden of those expectations must not sit with those nations alone. The Council must face up to its responsibilities; it must show some political courage of its own.

We all know that the situation in Syria has remained deadlocked for too long. The region cannot afford for the conflict to continue — nor can the Council, for its credibility is at stake. The human cost of the conflict is unacceptable and unsustainable. We welcome the Special Envoy for Syria's efforts and look forward to hearing more from him next week. But New Zealand believes that the Secretary-General's good offices alone cannot broker a political solution in Syria. Key players in the region and those on the Council need to recognize their responsibilities to do so.

In Yemen, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate alarmingly. The failure of the United Nations-convened talks in Geneva to reach agreement, followed by the failure represented by the recent humanitarian hiatus, have had immediate impacts. They risk undermining the Council's confidence in the commitment of the parties to reach a political solution. Again, we look forward to hearing from United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen Ahmed about prospects for progress. Above all, we need to find a way to stop the fighting in order to address the massive humanitarian needs.

We are mindful that Iraq is facing ongoing challenges on a number of fronts. We support the Secretary-General's request for a strategic assessment of how the United Nations can extend support to Iraq. We believe the Government's focus on further strengthening national reconciliation efforts is essential.

In Libya, the recent initialling of the Libyan political agreement by the Tobruk-based Libyan Government and a significant number of Libyan factions represents an important first step in what we hope will be a long journey towards a lasting Libyan peace. We now urge all members of the Tripoli-based General National Congress to stand on the right side of history: to fully commit to the Libyan political process and initial the agreement. There must also be consequences for those who decline to do so.

New Zealand has expressed its views on the Middle East peace process in this Chamber since January. The status quo is unsustainable and doing nothing is not viable. To that end, the Middle East Quartet's re-engagement in capitals on that issue in recent weeks is encouraging. The Security Council must also reengage. New Zealand has stated clearly that it sees a window of opportunity in the latter part of this year, when the Council should create a return pathway to the negotiating table and support the parties once they are there. That time is now close at hand.

Therefore, in this month's Middle East debate, the Council can reflect on a truly significant milestone on the Iran nuclear issue — the result of patient diplomacy and a commitment by all parties to reaching a political solution to settle differences. Those very same qualities urgently need to be applied to the other pressing challenges in the region. My country, New Zealand, believes that the Council has a responsibility to settle for nothing less.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Foreign Minister McCully for convening this meeting, and Special Coordinator Mladenov for his informative briefing and for all his essential work.

When the Security Council convenes every three months for an open debate on the Middle East, our discussion inevitably returns to a similar set of themes. They are the gut-wrenching and ever-growing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria; the urgent need to breathe new life into the efforts to achieve a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the importance of finding political solutions to those profound challenges, which have an impact far beyond the borders of any one country, or even the region. The longer those conflicts drag on, the greater the humanitarian consequences that must be addressed, and the deepening humanitarian crises exacerbate the conditions in which enmity and violence thrive, making it even harder to reach those durable political solutions.

That has been the pattern in Syria. This month we cross the calamitous threshold of 4 million refugees from the conflict, making Syria the largest refugee crisis in a quarter-century. Another 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced within the country's borders, and approximately half of all Syrians, 12.2 million people, need humanitarian assistance. Yet the international community is not just failing to keep pace with the urgent needs of this population, we are falling further and further behind. Just a quarter of the 2015 United Nations appeal for Syria has been funded — one quarter, for the greatest humanitarian crisis in a generation. The shortfall has immediate and profound consequences for Syrians in need. As a result of the funding gap, the World Food Programme has been forced to cut its food assistance for more than 5.5 million Syrians, and 750,000 Syrian refugee children are not in school. The shortfall also has considerable repercussions for Syria's neighbours, which have shown immense generosity and compassion in taking in millions of Syrians, and whose Governments and communities are left to fill in the gaps when the international community fails to step up.

As we have said all along, this humanitarian crisis is man-made. It is fuelled by the widespread atrocities of a regime, seemingly unsatisfied by the carnage wrought by its barrel bombs and use of chemical weapons, that is now dropping entire Dumpsters filled with explosives on neighbourhoods, and that did not even suspend its bombings on the celebratory holiday of Eid Al-Fitr. As one resident of Aleppo told a reporter, "Here, Eid means Assad's bombs". According to recent reporting, when residents fled an upsurge in fighting in the city of Dar'a in late June, the regime expanded its aerial bombing to target the open fields and villages where civilians took shelter. At least four hospitals in the villages where civilians fled were hit by aerial bombs, including one strike that reportedly killed five children in a hospital in the village of Taibeh. A doctor who leads a makeshift 12-bed clinic in Idlib province described the horror that followed air strikes on a nearby town on 4 June. More than 130 wounded, many of them children, arrived within hours. The doctor said,

> "Bodies were everywhere — on the tables, in the hallways, on the floor. The floor was full of blood. Medical staff and volunteers picked their way between the wounded, doing what they could."

Overwhelmed and able to provide only basic treatment, the clinic had to turn away 50 people. The doctor said, "The only choice we have is to replenish our supplies, gather our hopes and prepare for the next tragedy".

The humanitarian crisis is also fuelled by the terror of violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which in May released a video of children executing 25 soldiers in Palmyra, and which, just last week, posted footage of a child decapitating a Syrian army captain. A 14-year-old Yazidi boy who was abducted by ISIL and forced into one of their so-called cub training camps, designed to indoctrinate children as young as 4 or 5 years old, said that he and more than 100 other child recruits were given dolls on which to practice beheadings. In Dayr az Zawr, ISIL recently beheaded women for the first time, for the alleged crime of sorcery.

We must do more than name these challenges and call for them to be addressed. Instead, it is on us to come up with solutions that are pragmatic, principled and effective. For example, while it is important to call on Syria's neighbours to keep their borders open to the Syrians fleeing violence and persecution — thousands of whom are trapped at the border and struggling to survive — we also have a responsibility to help those neighbouring countries shoulder the immense costs of hosting massive refugee populations. We must condemn every use of chemical weapons in Syria, but also develop a way of identifying those who perpetrate, organize, sponsor or otherwise have a hand in such attacks, as the proposed joint investigative mechanism of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons would do, so that those responsible can one day be held accountable. And after two months of consultations with stakeholders, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, continues to work diligently to create a path towards a resolution

of Syria's crisis. His efforts deserve the Council's full support.

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, we risk falling into a similar pattern, especially with regard to rebuilding Gaza. Only 28 per cent of the funds pledged for Gaza's recovery at the Cairo conference in October have been disbursed. That means that around $2.5 billion that was committed to assisting the people of Gaza nine months ago has not materialized. As has been said, we are seeing a similarly profound gap in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which currently has a more than $100 million shortfall. UNRWA officials say — and we have heard the same thing again today — that if the shortfall is not met they will be forced to close its more than 700 schools, which serve some 500,000 students, nearly half of them in Gaza. Countries concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza must follow through on their commitments to the people who live there, and do their part to fill UNRWA's significant budget deficit. The United States has disbursed 95 per cent of the $400 million we pledged at the Cairo conference, and we provided more than $398 million to UNRWA in 2014, more than any other bilateral donor.

Of course, it has to be said that addressing Gaza's immediate humanitarian needs deals with the symptoms of conflict but not the root causes. We continue to believe that achieving a two-State solution through negotiations remains the best path forward, not only for resolving many of the issues in Gaza but also for Israel's security, Palestinian aspirations and security, and regional stability. We continue to look to the Israeli Government and the Palestinians to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to a two-State solution. Only then can trust be rebuilt and a cycle of escalation avoided in the future.

In conclusion, on Monday the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2231 (2015), endorsing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. If implemented, the deal would cut off all pathways for the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop the fissile material required for a nuclear weapon, while putting in place a rigorous inspection and transparency regime for verifying Iran's compliance. The true measure of the deal, of course, will be in its implementation. But also important, for the purposes of this debate and the Security Council in general, is what the Plan of Action tells us about how to tackle some of the world's most seemingly intractable problems. The first thing it tells us is about persistence. The deal was reached after two years of talks and gruelling negotiations between the P5+1 nations, the European Union and Iran. The second is pragmatism. The deal does not tackle every concern we have about Iran's destabilizing actions, but rather focuses on the gravest single threat to the region. The third is enforceability. The Plan of Action does not trust that Iran is not pursuing a nuclear-weapons programme; it puts in place rigorous verification measures that have the force of a unified international community behind them. The Security Council should take it as its challenge to apply those lessons to the other serious crises facing the region.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for presiding over this important meeting, and to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing today and his efforts in general.

The prospects in our region are dire. We are faced with challenges that are complicated, interlinked and unprecedented in their variety and extent. People in the region suffer daily from the repercussions of long-standing crises and conflicts. A failure to deal with their root causes will unquestionably make them worse and feed the sources of terrorism and extremism in a way that is a threat to the entire world. The international community must not waste time. The most recent détente regarding some of the issues in the region, and the international cooperation accompanying it, must be expanded on in order to launch a wider and more comprehensive dialogue on all the controversial issues in the region and to resolve the Palestinian question, which is at the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

Peace is not just a choice we call for over and over; it is the only way. We must work to create the conditions for the resumption of serious and comprehensive negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, eliminate the obstacles that stand in the way of such negotiations, entrench the two-State solution — creating a fully sovereign, independent Palestinian State on national Palestinian soil, along the lines of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital — as well as to ensure security and safety for all the peoples and States of the region.

Jordan has major genuine direct national interests in achieving peace. Direct negotiations that are both serious and commited, with a set time frame towards the two-State solution, must be resumed. Comprehensive peace must be achieved. And all fundamental

issues — Jerusalem, refugees, security, borders, water and others — must be addressed in accordance with the international terms of reference, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative in all its elements, so as to achieve vital Jordanian interests related to those matters. Such negotiations must be accompanied by a serious commitment, in words and deeds, to avoid any unilateral measures that may threaten or prejudice the results of the negotiations. That includes settlement activity, which the entire world agrees is illegal, as well as the forced expulsion of Palestinians and the demolition of their homes and confiscation of their land.

As a member of the Security Council, Chair of the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States and as a member of the Arab ministerial committee on negotiation and contact with major Powers, Jordan is committed to resuming serious negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to achieve and international agreement on a framework for negotiations through every possible means.

The United Nations and regional and international parties must improve all facets of the lives of Palestinians. They must take the necessary steps on the ground to support the Palestinian economy — whether by investing in the private sector, supporting the rule of law or facilitating the movement of people and goods. Jordan calls on the international community to put an end to the exacerbation of the social, economic and humanitarian suffering in the Gaza Strip, which is part and parcel of the future Palestinian State. The Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip must be lifted, and reconstruction must be revitalized. We call on the international donor community to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to fulfil its mandate — in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and, indeed, the countries that host Palestinian refugees. UNRWA faces an unprecedented financial shortfall, about which we have repeatedly warned. That shortfall will lead to reduced the services provided by the Agency, in particular to Jordan, which hosts the largest number of Palestinian refugees.

The Middle East region is known for its conflicts and instability. However, we know full well that our region is very rich in resources. Our young people want to live in security and to enjoy well-being. They want to preserve their identity and historic and cultural background. The international community must work to achieve comprehensive peace in the region and a solution to the Palestinian question.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join colleagues around the table, Sir, in warmly welcoming you to the Security Council today. On behalf of my delegation, I thank you for convening and presiding over this meeting. Your presence here today clearly demonstrates the importance New Zealand attaches to the subject of today's open debate. I also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing, which should strengthen our collective resolve to put an end to the saga of the tragic plight of the Palestinians.

On Monday, 20 July, Malaysia was honoured to co-host with Jordan an Arria Formula meeting of the Council to reflect on the situation in Gaza one year after the Israeli military offensive. I wish to thank Ambassador Dina Kawar of Jordan for co-chairing the meeting, as well as Council members for their active participation. The last such meeting was held in 1997. Speakers at the meeting came from the academia and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and did not represent any political stripe. The thrust of their presentation was on the dire humanitarian consequence. The stories of victims whose misfortune it was to live on the wrong side of the border tugged at the heartstrings of the presenters and led them to tell stories of anguish and despair, of continuous misfortune and suffering and of broken dreams and hopes. I would like to share my own reflections and impressions on the Arria Formula meeting and some of the pertinent points raised, which I hope will help us to provide a sharper focus on the consequences of the Palestine-Israeli conflict in the Council.

According to the World Bank, by May 2015 the continuing Israeli blockade had reduced Gaza's gross domestic product by 50 per cent. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate hovers at around 44 per cent, the highest in the world. According to the NGOs, basic construction materials — such as gravel, steel bars, cement, wood of certain thickness, along with a wide range of spare parts, computer equipment and vehicles — are classified as dual-use items, and their importation into Gaza is severely restricted by Israel. As of June 2015, less than 1 per cent of construction materials required for reconstruction had so far entered Gaza. Also according to them, since the offensive not a single destroyed house has been rebuilt. Awaiting construction are 12,580 housing units, while

17,817 families — roughly 100,000 persons — remain displaced. At the current pace, it will take 19 years for Gaza to be rebuilt. And there was recognition across the board from Council members that the humanitarian situation in Gaza was increasingly dire. Malaysia subscribes to the view that the situation of hopelessness only feeds strongly into the narratives of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh in their recruitment drives and represents a time bomb for the region unless drastic and immediate action is taken to address it.

The situation in Gaza cannot be looked at in isolation from the larger issue of the occupation and the attempts by the occupying Power to cement its control over the occupied Palestinian territory. The date of 9 July 2015 marked 11 years since the International Court of Justice rendered its unanimous advisory opinion on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* (see A/ES-10/273) — on the illegality of the construction of the Israeli separation, or apartheid, wall. We remained dismayed and outraged, in equal measure, that the Court's opinion continues to be flagrantly disregarded by Israel — not to mention the fact that to date no reparations have been made to those affected by the continuing construction of the system of walls and fences. We condemn the Israeli Supreme Court's approval, earlier this month, of the construction of a new section of the apartheid wall in southern Jerusalem.

At the same time, expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory continues in complete disregard of international law and the overwhelming disapproval of the international community. At a time when Muslims are rejoicing after Ramadhan, Israeli authorities decided to demolish more homes in a village in the south of Hebron. Israeli security forces continue to use unnecessary force to arrest or detain Palestinian children, some as young as 11. According to a recently released report by Human Rights Watch, Israeli security forces have choked children, thrown stun grenades at them and beaten them in custody. Furthermore, detained children are being tried before military courts — in gross violation of international law and human rights law. Ninety-five per cent of children released from Israeli jails have suffered from torture and ill treatment during interrogation and detention.

It defies logic and common sense to believe that these are the actions of a sincere partner for peace. The expansion of settlements, the continuing blockade against Gaza, the continued construction of the apartheid wall and the systematic and continuing denigration and subjugation of an entire people, backed by overwhelming military superiority, reveal a concerted attempt by Israel to alter the situation on the ground — leading to a one-State reality.

We call upon the international community and the Council to find the political will to halt that trend, which drives Palestinians and Israelis further away from a two-State solution and ensures that the flames of enmity between the two sides will never die out. While we remain committed to existing initiatives aimed at solving the conflict, we believe that new initiatives such as the proposed French draft resolution to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process must be given serious consideration.

At a time when the Middle East is rocked by raging conflict from Syria to Yemen, driven to a certain extent by extremist ideologies and ideologues, it is easy to forget that, according to the key narratives propagated by extremists and terrorists, such as Al-Qaida, Daesh and their ilk, those groups claim that they are also fighting against injustice and oppression in occupied Palestine. Ensuring a just, comprehensive and final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would contribute tow depriving those groups, their supporters and affiliates of such a false narrative.

In conclusion, Malaysia remains convinced that the United Nations must continue to play a central role in the achievement of a two-State solution for Palestine and Israel. Malaysia continues to believe that the time has come for the international community, and for the Council in particular, to lead the way and end the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Council must find the collective will to shoulder its Charter responsibilities in resolving this long-standing conflict, which is as old as the Organization itself.

My delegation associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Kuwait on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank New Zealand for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

The Middle East is at a critical juncture today, characterized by the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the continuation of the deadly conflict

in the Syrian Arab Republic, its deadly spillover into other countries — most notably Lebanon — and the conflict in Yemen.

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is glaringly apparent that without a final, just and equitable solution to the conflict that ensures Israelis their security and Palestinians an independent and viable State, efforts to establish an effective and sustainable peace in the Middle East will be illusory. However, the issue of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for more than six decades. The Palestinian people see no hope resulting from the efforts undertaken to put an end to the Israeli occupation and give them a sovereign State within the pre-June 1967 borders. The interminable negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians have worsened the current impasse in the peace process of the last several decades. The impasse also highlights the inability of the international community to put the peace process back on track. The status quo is becoming increasingly intolerable, both for the Palestinian people and for a large majority of the international community. The impasse in the peace process — we need to call a spade a spade — is attributable to Israel's refusal to accept a two-State solution, that is two States living side by side in peace and security.

Of course, peace initiatives cannot succeed if colonization activities continue on a large scale, if the separation wall continues to facilitate the seizure of land from the Palestinians, if international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions continue to be flouted by setting in concrete topographic changes from one day to the next, if the collective punishment and strident repression of the Palestinian people continue to be commonplace, if the blockade against Gaza continues, and if incursions by Israeli forces into holy sites, such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, continue to increase. I could go on.

All of those actions only increase tensions and weaken the possibilities for dialogue between the two sides. The negotiation process therefore requires an appropriate political environment and measures that encourage mutual trust. To that end, it is the international community's responsibility to intensify its efforts to help both parties take the difficult and courageous decisions needed to engage — in good faith — in dialogue. In that regard, the Security Council must fully assume its responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreements recently reached between the parties, in order to achieve a viable peace — one that will allow the Palestinian people to live in an independent and sovereign State. Accordingly, we urge both sides to resume dialogue, and we commend any initiative that seeks to relaunch the peace process by clearly establishing a framework for future negotiations with a deadline, which would put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Even without a negotiated solution, the accession of the State of Palestine to international organizations, treaties and conventions — with the ultimate aim being its full membership in the United Nations — could be an alternative and should be encouraged. At any event, the two-State solution should, under no circumstances, be called into question, because it is the only option possible for satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and for taking into account Israel's security concerns.

Concerning Syria, Chad is deeply concerned by the continuing violence and worsening of the humanitarian situation in that country. The situation has been exacerbated by the use of chemical weapons and other banned material, as well as by atrocities committed by terrorist groups tied to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and Al-Qaida. We are horrified to see the degree of self-destruction in Syria and to witness Syrians killing one another with such violence. The number of wounded and killed increases every day. Civilians are being deliberately attacked in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law. The various vital components of the infrastructure in that country have been practically destroyed. We condemn all violence — whatever its origin. The perpetrators of human rights violations must be identified and brought to justice. The scale of the violence, the inability of the international community to facilitate a cessation of hostilities between the parties and the absence of a political perspective have further worsened the suffering of the civilian population, who have been abandoned to their sad destiny. Confronted with that serious situation, the international community must not sit idly by; it must take all steps necessary to stop the violence and bring the parties back to direct negotiations in order to arrive at a just and sustainable political solution within the framework of the Geneva communiqué issued on 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). In that regard, we commend and support the

untiring efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, to find a way out of the crisis.

With regard to Lebanon, we commend the efforts of the Lebanese Government to fight incursions into its territory by the terrorist groups Daesh and Jabhat Al-Nusra. We call on all parties to the Syrian conflict to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Moreover, we encourage all Lebanese actors to dissociate themselves from the Syrian conflict and to adhere to the Baabda Declaration of June 2012 so as to protect Lebanon from repercussions of the regional crisis.

Lebanon still has to suffer the collateral effects of the Syrian crisis and faces a great many security, humanitarian and economic challenges. The long-standing vacancy in the presidency is undermining the stability of Lebanon and considerably hinders the proper functioning of State institutions. The political actors in Lebanon need to focus first and foremost on stability and national interests and to demonstrate flexibility to elect as soon as possible the country's President in order to better respond to the multiple challenges with which the country is confronted. We urge the international community to continue to assist Lebanon to surmount its difficulties and to reinforce its resilience in the region.

I conclude with the situation in Yemen. We are concerned by the ongoing conflict between the pro-Government forces and the Houthi rebels and by the ongoing degradation of the humanitarian situation. In the absence of a genuine humanitarian truce, the civilian population is trapped in the crossfire and is lacking practically everything. We call on all parties to the conflict to avoid the deliberate targeting of civilians and the country's vital infrastructure and to respect international humanitarian law and human rights. We also call on the parties to engage in good faith in an inclusive dialogue so that they can reach a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis, in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2216 (2015), and with the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, as well as with the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference. From that point of view, the international community should intensify its efforts to relaunch the political process so as to avoid the erosion of the legitimate institutions and the total foundering of the country. We reiterate our support for the efforts of Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, and we encourage him to continue his work to find a solution to the crisis.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand for coming and to congratulate New Zealand on its presidency of the Council for July. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

In the Middle East, since last summer, and even more since the recent visit of French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius to the region, France has been noting with concern that a two-State solution is becoming unrealizable. Day after day the continuance of the illegal settlements threatens the possibility of a two-State solution. The political void fuels the risk of an explosion, as illustrated by the proliferation of acts of violence. The Security Council's Arria Formula meeting on July 20 recalled that in Gaza the blockade perpetuates misery and despair, which strengthen extremism and expose the territory to a regular renewal of violence. If we want to end that negative and dangerous cycle — dangerous for the people of the region but also to international peace and security — it is urgent to reconstitue political prospects for the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian State, living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel.

How to make progress? First, by recognizing that the peace process as we have practised it for more than 20 years is insufficient. It is illusory to hope that the Israelis and the Palestinians can resume negotiations and, above all, conclude them without broad international support. France is determined to act to promote a credible resumption of the peace process. It concerns our security as well as the stability of the Middle East.

For my country, determined action to promote peace must be based on two pillars: the collective action and mobilization of the international community, on the one hand, and the definition of a framework for negotiations, on the other hand. This is something to which the Council should contribute. The international community must act collectively. That does not call into question either the historical role of the United States nor the existence of the Quartet. Rather, it has to do with involving more partners, beginning with the European Union, the League of Arab States and, especially, the permanent members of the Security Council, in order to assist the parties to make, but also to implement, the difficult compromises that will be

necessary for peace. That is the essence of the proposal to create an international support group, which has received backing from most of our partners.

Nearly 50 years after the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), it is essential to put the Council back at the heart of the conflict resolution — not to impose a solution on the parties, but to establish the framework for negotiations. When the time comes, it will be the Council's responsibility to adopt a consensual and balanced draft resolution that will set the parameters of the final status and define a timetable for negotiations. We are currently working to assemble the conditions for such an initiative, which will be meaningless if we do not receive the guarantees that it will be both widely supported and implemented. Without a political perspective, there is a risk that the parties will strengthen their unilateral strategies, which would be in nobody's interest. It is therefore time for the international community to renew its efforts for peace.

In Syria, four years after the start of the uprising, the human toll of the conflict is terrible, with more than 220,000 people killed, more than half of the population refugees or displaced persons, 12.2 million people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance, including 5.6 million children, and 440,000 persons besieged. Indiscriminate attacks by the Syrian regime through the daily use of barrel bombs are the main cause of civilian casualties. Following the Arria Formula meeting organized by France and Spain on the issue of barrel bombs, it is essential that the Security Council remains mobilized to put an end to the utilization of that inhumane weapon. As Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura often reminds us, there is no possible solution to the conflict as along as Bashar Al-Assad remains in power. There is no future with an ultra-minority clan that drowns the country in blood and continues to play a disturbing and dangerous game with Daesh.

To arrive at a solution, France for a number of months has been advocating a relaunch of the political process in Syria. On 29 July Mr. De Mistura will present to the Council the findings of consultations carried out over the past two months. We hope that those consultations will enable concrete proposals to operationalize the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex)with a view to a genuine political transition.

Finally, the situation in Lebanon is a source of concern on all fronts. The country is threatened by the Syrian crisis. It is infiltrated by terrorist groups, there is a massive presence of refugees, and Hizbullah is involved in Syria. It is also threatened by tensions between Hizbullah and Israel that could potentially lead to an escalation, with the risk of a new war in the Middle East that it cannot afford. It is also threatened by the presidential vacancy, which is all the more harmful since the country faces huge domestic challenges.

In that context, it is important for the international community to strengthen its support of Lebanon by helping it to take on the humanitarian challenge posed by the presence of Syrian refugees, by suppoting the Lebanese armed forces, by maintaining the capacity of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to prevent tensions in the south of Lebanon, by renewing the Force's mandate in August and, lastly, by urging Members of Parliament to rapidly elect a President, as the Council called for under France's presidency in March.

As a way to contribute in all of those areas, France believes that it would be useful to convene a meeting of the international support group at the ministerial level in New York, during the upcoming meeting of the General Assembly in September. The international community must not, and cannot, lose interest in Lebanon at a time when the challenges are greater than ever.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. Minister, for convening this open debate. I also wish to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

Spain aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. I will focus my statement today on three main points: the Middle East peace process, Yemen and Syria.

It is perhaps timely to assess the impact on the region of the recent agreement with Iran. What is certain is that the nuclear agreement resolves a question that has been weighing on the entire Middle East region; that is why we must now decisively resume consideration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The process is at a particularly difficult juncture. Both parties have declared themselves committed to the two-State solution; but we are still far from agreement on the conditions for undertaking negotiations. We must therefore make progress on two tracks: confidence-building measures and re-establishing a negotiating framework.

In terms of confidence-building on the part of the international community, that involves reacting to

measures that can be said to be moving backwards — for example, the demolition of homes and humanitarian facilities in Area C. That also involves recognizing the progress made, including the fact that no new settlements have been built in recent months.

At the same time, we must work towards Palestinian reconciliation and the establishment of a national unity Government under the authority of President Abbas. Currently, there is risk of a de facto split in Gaza when it becomes part of the future Palestinian State. We believe that intra-Palestinian reconciliation is essential to the continued viability of the two-State solution.

We must accelerate Gaza's reconstruction. One year after Operation Protective Edge, according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), almost no progress has been made in the reconstruction of homes. The figures provided today regarding UNRWA's financial resources are of serious concern. Also worrisome is the scenario described recently during the Arria Formula meeting, where the true suffering of the people in Gaza was highlighted.

The measures taken by the Israeli Government — the so-called economic peace — are positive, but we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal, which is the lifting of the blockade, with appropriate security guarantees for the State of Israel.

Not only do the settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza blockade gradually erode the peace process, they also heighten the risk of radicalization. The presence of the groups affiliated with Daesh in the Gaza Strip that have been identified in recent months should lead all parties to reflect on the urgent need to address the pressing political, humanitarian and security challenges.

With respect to the creation of a new political framework, there are no prospects for a solution without the involvement of the international community. We believe in the efforts made in coordination with the countries of the region to reaffirm the validity of the Arab Peace Initiative. Nevertheless, no initiative will exempt the Security Council from its responsibility. Sooner or later, as the representative of France just noted, the Council will have to propose a proper framework to the parties for a return to negotiations based on conditions and a specific time frame through a consensus-based resolution. Our Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, who visited the region just a few days ago, has sent that message to both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities.

Specifically, there are three messages. There is no alternative to the two-State solution. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation is urgent. And the Security Council must play a key role. The next quarterly open debate, in October, will provide an opportunity to assess the ways in which the Council can contribute to promoting the peace process in the Middle East.

I would also like to refer briefly to Yemen. The Security Council must not remain indifferent to the humanitarian tragedy that is facing the Yemeni people. We have repeatedly called for a humanitarian pause, without conditions. Humanitarian actors on the ground, such as Doctors Without Borders, have continued to warn us of the growing challenges in providing the assistance that has become more urgent each day. A neutral and more flexible mechanism is also essential for monitoring imports of food, fuel and other basic materials. We call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law. At the same time, we look forward to the prompt mediation by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of a dialogue between the parties towards a political solution in Yemen.

In conclusion, I would like to address Syria. The fifth year of the conflict in Syria is casting a devastating shadow. The humanitarian tragedy has reached absolutely intolerable limits. We all know the numbers, and saw them again today. However, we cannot forget that each number represents a person, a family or a story of unspeakable suffering that we have failed to prevent.

The same is true of the grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. We condemn most emphatically the absolute contempt shown for the most basic rules of international humanitarian law. Those responsible must know that they will be held accountable for their actions. In any case, we should not fail to note the specific obligation of the Syrian Government, in its capacity as the Government, to protect its citizens, as well as its full responsibility for its unjustified, barbaric and indiscriminate attacks against its own people.

Spain has drawn attention, on many occasions, to the urgency of making progress towards a political solution in Syria, as it is the only way to end the conflict. We reiterate once again our firm commitment to a solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

In that regard, we support the work achieved by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura during the weeks of consultations with all of the relevant stakeholders. We highly value the participation of regional actors in the consultations, as we believe they are absolutely essential to achieving peace in Syria. We therefore look forward with great interest to Mr. De Mistura's briefing to the Council next week.

We call on the parties to the conflict, the States of the region and the members of the Council to shoulder the responsibility of uniting their efforts, over and above all of the differences, to achieve a common goal: peace and stability for the Syrian people. Syria and its people must be our priority. We especially appeal to the moderate opposition. An open and constructive attitude is essential on the part of the various groups in order to pave the way towards a reasonable meeting point upon which to build a future for Syria.

Failure to act on all fronts will dangerously increase the risk of an institutional vacuum that will only benefit Daesh and other terrorist groups and further aggravate the instability of the entire region. It is our duty to prevent that. The Council cannot continue any longer to shirk its obligations — enough of merely making statements. We have heard too much talk, including again today. It is time to become involved and to make a genuine commitment to a negotiated political solution that is pluralistic and democratic. It is the only way to guarantee sustainable security and stability in Syria and a place for all Syrians to belong.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Russia has consistently advocated in favour of the speedy achievement of a just Palestinian-Israeli settlement on the basis of agreed international law, including the implementation of the Madrid principles, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Arab Peace Initiative and previously reached agreements. Mutually acceptable agreements are required to ensure the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State coexisting in peace with all of its neighbours. We believe that this would represent not only the realization of the aspirations of the Palestinians but also an excellent guarantee of security for Israel.

Negotiations must resume as soon as possible. We believe that the measure of their success would be the parties' abandonment of unilateral actions that prejudge the outcome of the final settlement. This concerns first of all the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. We will continue to help to facilitate the resumption of negotiations through bilateral channels and in various international forums, first and foremost through the Middle East Quartet of international mediators. We deem important the intensification of new contacts of special representatives in regional capitals. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in Moscow in July, was most useful.

The Security Council could also play a substantive role in promoting a settlement. We are convinced that the international community can shift the situation relating to Palestinian-Israeli affairs and stop the drift towards a one-State reality. This is something that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians want to see.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa is, without exaggeration, catastrophic. The region is in the throes of large-scale bloody conflicts, in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya, which fuel one another and create conditions for the overflow of instability into the neighbouring countries in Africa, the Mediterranean and Central Asia. A number of States in the region are on the brink of losing their territorial integrity. There have been migratory flows on an unprecedented scale, with hundreds of thousands of refugees. Many countries that up until recently had seemed prosperous are now facing the consequences of these conflicts. Also unprecedented is the scale of terrorism in the region. Terrorist acts resulting in dozens of casualties erupt in one part of a region and then another, reaching all the way to Europe. What can neighbouring countries do if even other continents have to deal with the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters who go to the Middle East?

The result of, first, the invasion of Iraq and then the external interference in the conflict in Syria, including flirting with the armed opposition, was the emergence of a new threat, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which, having firmly established itself in these two countries, has now basically started its march across the planet.

We are convinced that we can effectively counter this scourge only if we act together, taking a comprehensive approach that is free of double standards and based on international legality, relying on the prerogatives of the Council. All of the countries of the region must now set aside their differences, which have always existed and probably will remain on certain issues, so that they can ensure that all efforts are geared to fighting the common threat.

An important contribution in that respect is the series of Security Council resolutions on counterterrorism. Pride of place should be accorded to resolution 2199 (2015), which is aimed at stopping financial flows to ISIL and Jabhat Al-Nusa, especially those from the oil trade. We call on all Member States to responsibly implement this approach and to take decisive steps to stop this criminal activity. We commend the recommendations put forward by the Al-Qaida Monitoring Group in this regard.

Criminal proceeds are in turn used in the commission of new crimes. Terrorists have already been working on how to synthesize, manufacture and use chemical warfare agents. The danger of this was mentioned by the Russian delegation as early as November 2014, when we proposed that the Security Council adopt a presidential statement on the subject of chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists. News of the development of chemical weapons by ISIL and other terrorist groups in Syria and in Iraq indicates that this trend is on the increase. Perhaps we should go back to the idea we expressed last year.

The unprecedented increase in the terrorist threat is something that can be explained not only by the financial support of the caliphate and its allies but also by the fact that their fighters are ideologically highly motivated. Of course this problem has many dimensions. But we believe that a key factor in this regard is the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which creates the conditions and arguments for recruiting new people into terrorist entities.

Today we can speak about joint actions to combat terrorism in the Middle with a certain amount of optimism. Very recently the world witnessed a major diplomatic achievement: the signing of an agreement on the situation surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme, which was supported by a unanimously adopted Security Council resolution. This demonstrated that when there is political will, when we are realistic and respect one another's legal interests, we can resolve the most difficult issues.

Secondly, we hope that this will help countries in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf refrain from taking destabilizing steps, prevent the region from becoming involved in an arms race, make it possible to jointly seek solutions to security issues, and improve the situation in the wider region.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the convening by New Zealand of this open debate on the question of the Middle East. China welcomes the fact that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand has travelled to New York to personally preside over the meeting. I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing. I also listened attentively to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

Recently, the situation between Palestine and Israel has remained tense. The Middle East peace process remains bogged down. China has always believed that achieving independent statehood for Palestine and peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel through peace talks is the only viable way to address the Israel-Palestine question. There is no winner in this conflict. Force will only exacerbate hatred and hostility. All questions should be resolved through negotiation. Palestine and Israel must both be committed to taking the strategic option of peace talks, strengthen their confidence in peace, maintain their patience with regard to peace talks, demonstrate their determination to achieve peace, and resume as soon as possible and promote the peace talks.

We hope that the Israeli Government will take credible measures to create the conditions for peace talks, including steps to halt the construction of settlements, release the detained Palestinians and completely lift the blockade against Gaza. At the same time, Israel's legitimate security concerns should also be seriously addressed.

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian question will require joint efforts by both parties and the international community as a whole. China hopes that efforts will be made to fully tap the potential of existing mechanisms in the Middle East peace process. China also supports the Security Council in its efforts to play its rightful role on this question, actively respond to the legitimate demands of Palestine and the Arab countries and take concrete measures to promote peace talks, bring about an end to occupation and promote reconstruction in Gaza.

China has always firmly supported the Palestinian people's just cause of struggling for the restoration of their legitimate national rights. China supports the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

China wishes to see Palestine and Israel enjoy common peace and security. China is open to all initiatives conducive to resuming the dialogue and negotiations. China has always, through its own ways and means, actively promoted peace among the parties concerned. China has long provided assistance within our capacity to support capacity-building in Palestine and ease the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are ready to work with other parties in the international community to make more contributions to the achievement of peace between Palestine and Israel, in favour of stability in the region.

The question of Syria is central to the situation in the Middle East and to international peace and stability in general. Finding a comprehensive, lasting and appropriate solution to the question of Syria is consistent with the common interests of the people of Syria and the countries of the region and the international community as a whole. The situation in Syria is now at crucial juncture. The international community should be unwaveringly committed to seeking a political settlement, setting forth clear targets and making concerted efforts.

The priority tasks at this moment should be, first, to promote early and unconditional participation by all sides in the negotiations and dialogue with a view to reaching a settlement plan that is suitable to the situation of the country and accommodates the interests of all sides. Secondly, the good offices of the countries of the region, particularly those with influence, must be actively carried out; those countries must fully play their role. Thirdly, it is essential that the broadest possible participation of all stakeholders be ensured, and it is necessary that the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, remain unified with respect to the question of Syria.

China has always supported the United Nations in playing a leading role on the question of Syria. We recently welcomed Special Envoy De Mistura to China and encouraged him to continue to play an active role in seeking the political settlement of the question of Syria. China will continue to play an active and constructive role in bringing about a comprehensive, just and appropriate settlement of the question of Syria.

Mr. Laro (Nigeria): I also thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and commend him for his effective leadership. We take this opportunity to assure him of our full support.

Nigeria is concerned about the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process. The status quo does not offer a sustainable solution to the question of Palestine. What is required is a genuine effort on the part of Israel and Palestine to return to the peace process. We urge the leadership on both sides to take the steps necessary for achieving lasting peace. We call on States with influence over the parties to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map and the agreements existing between them.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side by side in peace and security. Nigeria welcomes the meeting of the envoys of the Middle East Quartet held in Cairo at the end of June, during which they considered ways to revive negotiations and advance the two-State solution. We look forward to positive outcomes from the Quartet's outreach to Arab States. The engagement of Arab States is vital to the search for lasting peace in the Middle East.

With respect to the conflict in Syria, Nigeria is pleased to note the sustained efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura in holding discussions with the warring parties. We commend the Special Envoy for his hard work, patience and perseverance. It is important, and indeed urgent, that the parties find a convergence of views to enable a resumption of negotiations. We encourage Special Envoy De Mistura not to relent in his efforts, and we assure him of our continued support. Our position remains that a military solution to the conflict in Syria is unattainable. Only a negotiated solution can bring lasting peace to the country.

Turning to Yemen, Nigeria calls for a total cessation of the hostilities that have left thousands of civilians dead, injured and displaced. A permanent ceasefire is the necessary first step towards improving the humanitarian situation in the country. A ceasefire would also boost the chances of moving the peace process forward. We encourage the parties to cooperate fully with the Special Envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed in his efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict in the country. We reaffirm our support for a political solution on the basis of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. McCully, and thank him for presiding over this important debate. We would also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and wish him success in his difficult task.

Our delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The conditions of political instability in the Middle East are alarming due to the high level of violence that has ravaged the region. The actions of terrorist organizations are taking on an ever-more relevant role. Foreign interventions, military invasions and interference in the internal affairs of States have triggered conflicts and wars that have undermined political stability in the region and led to the collapse of the State and its institutions in many countries in conflict. This institutional collapse and political instability have created the conditions that have allowed for the incursion of terrorist groups, which have spread their extremist and intolerant ideology and subjected the peoples of the region to unacceptable violence and brutality in their zeal to impose their world view on others.

One of the fundamental problems conflict is that political instability in the Middle East has been fomented by opposing geopolitical interests and visions, which in order to fulfil political or military objectives, have funded and supported the military actions of non-State armed groups which eventually become terrorist groups. The peoples of the Middle East continue to pay a high cost in human lives and suffering, which has been the result of the opposing interests of major power brokers that deal militarily in the Middle East as if it were great chessboard.

In this climate of political instability and ongoing tension, the situation of the Palestinian people and the prolonged conflict becomes fundamentally relevant. This conflict must be resolved in order for a comprehensive political process — one that will ultimately lead to a lasting peace in the region — to be started.

More than half a century ago, with support from the colonial Powers of the time, the pillaging of lands that for centuries had been occupied the Palestinian people began. Since then the occupying Power, Israel, has been moving forward in an ongoing process of colonizing the territory, and it has done so against the backdrop of the international community's inaction, in flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the right of self-determination that empowers the Palestinians to enjoy an independent State within internationally recognized 1967 borders.

A year ago, the Gaza Strip and its population were the victims of the brutal and disproportionate Israeli military attack known as Operation Protective Edge. During the 52-day campaign Israel indiscriminately bombed the population of Gaza and destroyed its civilian installations and facilities, including schools and hospitals. As a result of that military aggression, 2,220 people were killed, including 551 children, more than 11,000 were wounded and 12,600 homes were destroyed.

Venezuela calls for those responsible for those war crimes to be brought to justice so that they are held accountable for their criminal actions. The occupying Power, in addition to proceeding with the ongoing destruction of civilian infrastructure and Palestinian homes, has devoted its efforts to attacking the future of the new Palestinian generation. The children and young people in the occupied territories are the focus of constant violence. They are detained and imprisoned on an ongoing basis by the Israeli military forces merely because they are Palestinian. Once again, Israel's actions show its contempt for human rights and how it uses violence as a policy to maintain its colonial presence.

Time is of the essence for the occupying Power. Time allows it to continue to implement its strategy of disregard for the human rights of the Palestinian people. The ultimate goal is to take over all the Palestinian land and to expel those who still still survive there. It will do so through its systematic settlements policy. That situation has persisted since the Nakba of 1948 until today.

The central problem is that Israel, because it has the political and military support of the great centres of power, feels that it has sufficient force to undermine all attempts to reach a negotiated solution to the conflict. It feels, all the while, that it can disregard the resolutions, appeals and urgent calls of the Security Council, and even of the General Assembly. The occupying Power boycotts every peace initiative that comes along, protected by that support. That plunges the Palestinian people into a situation of tension and desperation, which may at any moment unleash a military escalation

in this conflict. Israel appears to be constantly trying to engender military conflicts in order to continue to acquire more territory through the use of force.

Our country advocates the immediate cessation of the settlements policy, of which the Palestinian people is the victim. The policy of demolishing Palestinian homes and constructing Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, in violation of all international legal texts, must cease. On that count, we call on the international community to exhort Israel to cease that ongoing practice. We also call for end to the process of expelling Palestinians and colonizing Palestinian land.

The Security Council has been deliberating the issue of Palestine for more than 50 years, yet to date we have been unable to put a stop to the illegal situation prevailing there. We wonder how long the Security Council will continue to fail to agree on decisive action to uphold the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to their territory. It is time for the Council to take a firm stance in favour of peace, justice and hope for a people who are appealing for a lasting and comprehensive solution, a solution that would recognize two States: the State of Israel and the State of Palestine.

That topic cannot be avoided or evaded. The Security Council is the natural forum in which to debate and find a solution to those issues. We support the action of the Palestinian authorities to assert their sovereignty. Palestine's support for various legal instruments in the field of human rights and criminal law, such as the Rome Statute, are a concrete manifestation of its commitment to respect international law.

We are committed to the cause of peace in the Middle East. In that regard, we support all initiatives that assist the Palestinian people in exercising their right to self-determination. Venezuela reiterates that the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the announcement made by France to promote a draft resolution that paves the way for peace negotiations and ending the occupation — all have a common denominator, namely, to achieve a definitive solution to the conflict.

The current reality is entirely untenable. Israel continues to use force indiscriminately against a population that has been entirely ignored and abandoned in terms of its struggle to enjoy its rights. The resolution of the Palestinian issue is of vital importance in these times in order to ensure that violent extremism, for example the activities of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and the Al-Nusra Front, among others, do not become entrenched in the Palestinian territories. That would only exacerbate the already conflict-ridden situation in the Middle East.

The seventieth anniversary of the United Nations imposes a moral and political obligation upon us to redouble our efforts to end the colonialism and foreign occupation that the Palestinian population has been a victim of. They have been illegally expelled from their lands. We call for the incorporation of Palestine as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. A recommendation by the Security Council to the General Assembly to incorporate Palestine as a full-fledged member of the United Nations would send a positive signal. It would represent the Organization's commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestine crisis on the basis of a two-State solution.

The intransigent attitude of Israel and its actions behind the backs of the international community have had a negative impact on the region, as can be seen in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan Heights. In that regard, Venezuela condemns actions that violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and are in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We call on Israel to end those illegal practices. Moreover, we condemn the measures that Israel has applied in the Syrian Golan Heights. The intention of those measures has been to change the legal, demographic and physical status of that territory. Once again, we call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, in accordance with international law.

To conclude, a few days ago the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution in support of the agreement reached among the P5+1 and Iran on Iran's nuclear programme. We sincerely commend the countries involved in that agreement, as it represents a victory for diplomacy and peace over war and intolerance. We call on members of the Council to ensure that the same political judgment and that same sensible approach prevail in the resolution of conflicts in the Middle East. Those conflicts have shattered hundreds of thousands of lives. We must work more intensively to promote peace and to ensure that less hate and war exist in the world. We must work for the peace of the Syrian people, the Iraqi people, the people of Lebanon and the people of Yemen. We must work for peace and a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand. We are also grateful for the briefing by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

The status quo must be overturned. Reactivating the negotiations is an unavoidable challenge, and the Council has a responsibility to contribute. It is urgent that we reopen the doors to dialogue, and we believe that the Council can create the conditions for that by promoting effective negotiations that can help the parties to arrive at a peaceful solution. That effort will require a collective commitment that can create bonds of trust and eliminate cycles of violence.

We are concerned about the actions and decisions of certain actors that could suggest a retreat and hinder the resumption of negotiations. We note with concern the policy of expanding settlements, since a peace process is not viable while that policy of occupying territory continues. It is also imperative to end the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The two-State solution is the only alternative that offers guarantees to both parties. A negotiating process is not sustainable if it does not recognize Palestine's desire to exercise its right to self-determination or provide Israel with the safeguards it needs to ensure its existence. In accordance with our commitment to inclusive and democratic dialogue, we will support initiatives that can pave the way for a peace process based on defined parameters and within a specified time frame.

With regard to Lebanon, we acknowledge the efforts the Lebanese authorities have made to host Syrian refugees, fight terrorism and strengthen State institutions. We hope the country's political leaders will end the current situation of the vacant presidency.

With regard to Syria, we condemn the persistent flouting of international humanitarian law and the violations and abuses of human rights committed by all parties to the conflict, and we reiterate the importance of accountability. Chile supports the Secretary-General's calls for ensuring humanitarian access, which will enable assistance to reach, in particular, people in areas that are hard to access. Those efforts require the cooperation of all parties involved, which is vital if conditions are to be created that will allow the Syrian people to live in dignity and peace. However, we realize that only a political solution can end the humanitarian and security crisis in Syria, and we are therefore eagerly awaiting the report that Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will present to the Security Council in the next few days.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate, and I welcome Mr. Nickolay Mladenov's presence and compelling briefing. The timing of this open debate, a year after the conflict in Gaza, is sadly fitting. Today is an important moment to remember all those who lost their lives, recommit ourselves to doing all we can to prevent further violence and extend that commitment beyond Gaza to Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East region.

As we heard in the moving Arria Formula meeting earlier this week, the painful consequences of the fighting in Gaza continue to this day. It is increasingly clear that urgent action is needed to preserve the two-State solution and alleviate the impact of the occupation. The British Foreign Secretary saw that at first hand during his recent visit. Improving conditions in Gaza and the West Bank is a vital first step.

Israel's recent plans to construct more than 900 new settlement housing units in the West Bank are clearly contrary to the goal of peace, and so are the plans to evict Palestinians from the village of Susiya. We are pleased that Israel has taken some steps to ease restrictions in Gaza, but increasing exports and doubling the water supply are not enough. The humanitarian situation remains unacceptable. More than 100,000 people are still displaced. Power outages last for up to 12 hours a day, and 120,000 people are still without a water supply.

We need to see rapid progress in improving living conditions, the quality of life and the economic outlook in Gaza. The movement of people between Gaza or the West Bank and Israel should be eased. Exports from Gaza should be allowed to increase to 2007's levels. The water supply should be doubled again, and restrictions on fishing, electricity and waste-water treatment should be eased.

Action is needed from both sides. We call on the Palestinian Authority, led by President Abbas, to take concrete steps to return to Gaza. We urge him to advance reconciliation and demonstrate clearly that he is the leader of all Palestinian people.

The international community has a vital role to play, too. All of us should urge donors to fulfil their financial pledges in order to aid reconstruction efforts

in Gaza without delay. Of all the international pledges made in Cairo, only 27 per cent have so far been met. The United Kingdom is playing its part. We support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in its vital work, as well Mr. Mladenov's calls for donors to step up. Since last summer we have been one of the largest donors to Gaza, providing more than $26 million in emergency assistance, and we pledged an additional $31 million at the reconstruction conference in Cairo.

Together we must work harder than ever to create conditions on the ground to foster a return to meaningful negotiations. In so doing, we can bring real improvements to those on both sides who have suffered for far too long. And the Council must be ready to play its part when those conditions have been created.

That same approach is also desperately needed in Syria. For too long we have been briefed on the indiscriminate use of barrel bombs by the Al-Assad regime. The recent briefing from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs made it clear that attacks on hospitals are still commonplace. That is barbaric and unacceptable. For too long we have heard distressing reports of the use of chemical weapons. The Council will soon have the chance to send a clear message to Al-Assad on that issue, and I hope that all members will support the draft resolution on a joint investigative mechanism when it is presented to the Council.

It is clearer than ever that there can be no military victory in Syria; only a political solution can end the bloodshed. I look forward to the briefing next week by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. It is vital that we redouble our support for his efforts to bring about an inclusive political transition that operationalizes the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). A Government that acts on behalf of all Syrians, one strong enough to defeat the threat of extremism, is long overdue.

The consequences of not dealing with the crisis in Syria can be seen in the camps across neighbouring countries. Millions of Syrians are now reliant on the generosity of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the international community. Lebanon has accepted nearly 1.2 million Syrian refugees, increasing its population by nearly a quarter. We must recognize and help to alleviate the pressure that has created. The United Kingdom has given $296 million to support Lebanon. We are making a real difference by providing food, shelter and medical aid to the most vulnerable in refugee and host communities. But we are concerned that the Lebanese crisis response plan remains desperately underfunded. All of us must work with donors, particularly in the Gulf, to help meet the basic needs of host communities and refugees. It is crucial that the Lebanese Government elect a President without any further delay, so that it can meet the needs of all Lebanese people.

I would like to conclude as I began, by focusing on the timeliness of this debate. On Monday, the Council unanimously agreed on resolution 2231 (2015), on Iran's nuclear programme, bringing more than a decade of negotiations to an end. It is good for the region and good for the international community. We hope and expect that the agreement will herald a new era of positive Iranian engagement in the region. In reaching the agreement, the five permanent members of the Council, together with our German and European Union colleagues, showed a unity of purpose that is sometimes sadly lacking in other Council business on the Middle East. It is that spirit of cooperation and determination that we will need to harness for our work on the Middle East peace process and Syria. We have seen the consequences of our failure to do so for too long.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): At the outset, we would like to extend a warm welcome to you, Sir, as well as our thanks for presiding over this debate. We also thank Mr. Mladenov for his insightful briefing and extend our support for his work.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We are deeply disappointed at the lack of any meaningful progress in the resolution of conflicts affecting the Middle East. As the political, economic and social situation across the region continues to deteriorate, the Security Council remains unable to present a unified front in tackling these issues. Certainly, the Security Council achieved unanimity in endorsing the agreement concluded by the permanent members, Germany and the European Union with the Islamic Republic of Iran — a remarkable diplomatic achievement, above all if we take into account that diplomacy in the Middle East has a deplorable record of defeats in the past 20 years or more. As we stated (see S/PV.7488) in the debate following the adoption of resolution 2231 (2015), now our best expectation is that the agreement on the Iran nuclear programme will

trigger a game-change by creating new dynamics in the whole region and ending the extreme and stressful conditions of war, terrorism, sectarianism, intolerance and oppression.

It is high time that the permanent members of the Security Council uphold their privileges as great Powers as entrusted in the Charter of the United Nations and take full advantage of the psychological and political boost afforded by the treaty concluded with Iran by decisively reaching out to other regional Powers and countries of the Middle East, with a view towards addressing and resolving proxy wars and serious crisis situations affecting the region, namely, the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and its terrorist affiliates, the Syrian war, the conflict in Yemen, the Palestinian issue and the extreme sectarianism between Sunni and Shia communities in the region.

A lack of consensus among Council members prevails on all Middle East crises, weakening the Council's ability to find solutions to intricate international problems and undermining its credibility as the main organ in charge of international peace and security. The consequences of such a state of affairs are bleak, with the proliferation of armed groups and terrorist organizations across the region carrying out deadly attacks against civilians and religious and ethnic minorities, destroying universal cultural heritage and committing the most egregious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine remains in a deadlock, with the parties — even with assistance from the international community — unable to disentangle the deadly web that keeps both peoples unable to reach out to one another and start a new era in their relations. It is clear that international public opinion despairs at the hesitation and lack of purpose that the Security Council has demonstrated over the years on this extremely sensitive issue. Nonetheless, there has been consensus for quite some time — in the Security Council and in the international community at large — that a peaceful and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be based on the two-State solution, the State of Israel and the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, living side by side as good neighbours in peace and security, as the only viable option for a comprehensive peace settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

The great Powers, the permanent members of the Security Council, should commit to their leadership status by pushing the parties to the conflict, and the entire international community as a whole, to support a solution to the Palestinian question based on one resolution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Oslo Accords. We believe that the permanent members, being vested with special priviliges in the Security Council in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, have the inalienable right to do so. We furthermore believe that such privileges should not be upheld merely for the defence of national interests and circumstantial alliances, but should be used instead for strengthening peace and security and, in this case, to make a meaningul contribution to solving the Palestinian question.

More than 20 years have elapsed since Israelis and Palestinians were close to a comprehensive peace settlement through mutual concessions and political will, permitting both peoples to live together in freedom, peace and security. It is our conviction that, in the present circumstances, only the Security Council — if united — can play the role of an honest broker, provide political and security guarantees to the parties, engage the international community and the countries of the region, play a leading role in putting Israelis and Palestinians on the right track and make a decisive contribution to the attainment of peace.

Mr. Baublys (Lithuania): I thank Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union later today.

The vision of a democratic, robust, and prosperous Middle East remains unfulfilled. Radicalization, the spread of terrorism, the proliferation of weapons, declining economies, and uprooted people make it incumbent upon the international community to look for an urgent way to end the conflicts.

The situation in the Palestinian territories continues to raise our greatest concern. The reality on the ground gives little reason for hope. Recent rocket attacks by militant groups underline once again the volatility of the current deadlock, which risks escalating even further. Continuing settlement expansion and demolitions severely erode the prospects for a viable two-State solution, plunging the parties even deeper into the circle of violence and mutual mistrust.

Gaza needs immediate and genuine reconstruction and development. For the first time, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East is about to run out of funds, overwhelmed by mounting challenges. There are growing risks of further radicalization in the Gaza Strip. Improving humanitarian and economic conditions in Gaza could be a key factor in prospects for peace itself.

We welcome the recent steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in Gaza. But the immediate and unconditional lifting of the closure on the Strip and the free flow of people and goods, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns, are necessary for genuine relief and recovery.

We call on Israel to enable accelerated Palestinian construction, as well as socioeconomic development, in Area C. We furthermore call on the Israeli authorities to halt plans for forced transfers of the population and the demolition of Palestinian housing. We also urge Palestine and Israel to make efforts to improve political, economic and security conditions of life for the Palestinian people. Such actions will serve to strengthen the prosperity and security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

We look forward towards renewed engagement in the peace process by the United States, with strong involvement by the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Quartet and regional actors. There is no other solution but an immediate resumption of peace negotiations to seek a final political settlement based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including the principle of land for peace — the road map, and the Arab peace initiative, leading to two democratic and sovereign States living side by side within established borders.

Syria has become the worst humanitarian crisis and a State failure. Just under a quarter of a million Syrians have been killed, and more than half of the population is displaced. Impunity reigns, justice and accountability are absent and the political process runs on empty. The Syrian Government has failed in its responsibility to protect its people. It has been a perpetrator of crimes against its very own people. Chlorine gas attacks are fast becoming a daily reality. They persist because perpetrators continuously escape justice. Only by attributing responsibility to specific individuals, entities and Governments that are responsible for chemical weapons attacks can we make them stop. The Council must take action in that regard.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has taken steps to alleviate the suffering of the people, but obstacles to humanitarian aid and medical assistance are too numerous. Progress on accountability for appalling crimes is nowhere in sight. It is up to the international community to live up to its responsibility to protect. A political solution is the only way forward, and we look forward to the briefing by Staffan de Mistura to the Council next week.

In Lebanon, the longer the crisis of institutions remains unresolved, the greater the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to Lebanon's integrity and stability. The international community must continue to assist the country in strengthening its institutions and its army and managing the impact of the influx of Syrian refugees.

I conclude with Yemen, which continues to suffer from casualties of more than 3,500 dead, 16,000 injured and nearly 1.3 million displaced. Four out of five Yemenis are in need of humanitarian assistance. A reliable flow of humanitarian aid into Yemen is urgently needed, while avoiding excessive restrictions on both United Nations and commercial shipments. All Yemeni parties should engage in dialogue without preconditions and rally behind United Nations-facilitated processes. The alternative is State fragmentation, the rise of sectarianism and empowerment of terrorist groups.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by commending the excellent work done by your delegation during your presidency of the Security Council for this month. Through you, I would like to extend our deepest appreciation for the job well done by Malaysia during its presidency of the Council for the previous month. I would also like to extend our deep appreciation to Mr. Mladenov for his sobering briefing.

We meet today while the Middle East faces new challenges, but the Middle East is still tormented by the Israeli occupation. One year ago, Israel unleashed its military operation against Palestinian civilians in Gaza — 51 days of continuous Israeli raids, killings, massive destruction and disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force. The words of an Israeli soldier from the report entitled *This Is How We Fought in Gaza* say it all: "By the time we got out of there, it was all like a sandbox". That is what they did to the people, while also maintaining their blockade on Gaza.

Today the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that not one of the 12,620 totally destroyed units has been rebuilt, while the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East states that 880,000 Palestine refugees rely on quarterly food assistance. The International Monetary Fund sounded the alarm when it declared that the unemployment rate had reached 46 per cent.

Makarim Wibisono, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, captured the essence of Israeli practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem when he said that occupation policies constrain Palestinian life and push Palestinians to leave their land and homes, especially in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Suffice it to mention that in 2014 the Government of Israel demolished 493 Palestinian structures in Area C, and today it threatens to demolish the village of Susiya village, near Hebron. In the first quarter of 2015, the same Government authorized the continued construction of settlements in the West Bank, with a 219 per cent spike in completed housing and a 93 per cent rise in starts. That is a typical approach by Israel: not to miss an opportunity to negate the two-State solution by stalling the process and seizing land.

In the midst of this desolation, the historic agreement between the Vatican and the State of Palestine is a ray of hope. It should summon the moral audacity of the international community to finally break the political stalemate and to translate the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people into realities. Indeed, the Security Council should do much more to establish a new, credible and comprehensive framework for negotiations to be concluded in a defined time frame and based on the well-known parameters set by the relevant United Nations resolutions — in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III) — the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

During this month, the total number of Syrian refugees has exceeded 4 million — the biggest refugee population from a single conflict in a generation, according to High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. More than 1.2 million of those refugees fled to my country and are registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The situation of those refugees and their host community remains extremely challenging. My Government continues to work relentlessly with the international community. The latest endeavour in this regard was the adoption of the Lebanese crisis response plan. Yet it is alarming that only 21 per cent of the plan has been funded. Time and again, we have reiterated that it is imperative to counter the refugees' despair by widening the humanitarian space, based on the principle of shared responsibility, and by intensifying resettlement programmes. Those refugees and their host communities should not be forgotten or ignored.

This month coincides with the commemoration of many atrocities around the world: the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, the ninth anniversary of the Israeli war on Lebanon, which ended with the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), and the first anniversary of the most recent Israeli war on Gaza. For all the victims — women, children and the elderly — our message and actions today should be: "Never again".

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India

Mr. Mukerji (India): I thank you, Foreign Minister McCully, President of the Council, for convening of this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing.

This quarterly debate is important in that it gives us an opportunity to take stock of developments in the Middle East peace process. More important, however, is the response by the Security Council. We have seen that the Council has at best been a standby witness to phases of escalation and relative calm, which has become characteristic of this unsettled issue. The effectiveness of the Council has consequently been brought into question. We join others in urging the Council to step up its efforts and take the lead in resolving this problem.

India's deep association with and continuing commitment to Palestine is rooted in our modern history, which goes back to our own struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine has always been firm and clear. We reaffirm our support for the cause of Palestine and our solidarity with the Palestinian people for their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Apart from its political support to the Palestinian cause, India continues to support its development and nation-building efforts by consistently extending

technical and financial assistance. Earlier this month, a new school for girls, the Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Girls, was inaugurated in Asera Al-Shamalyeh. It is a part of India's larger capacity-building initiatives in Palestine.

We contribute $1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. We pledged and contributed $4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. We have undertaken important bilateral development projects in health, education, skills development and vocational training, as well as providing budgetary support to the Palestinian Government. We are also implementing development projects in Palestine jointly with Brazil and South Africa, within the framework of the India, Brazil and South Africa group, and have pledged $1 million for a new project to reconstruct the Atta Habib Medical Centre in Gaza.

This debate is taking place a year after the unfortunate escalation of the Gaza conflict. We are particularly worried that since July 2014 there has been a downward trend in the peace process, despite efforts for serious negotiations between the parties, which have remained inconclusive. Unilateral actions by the parties are unfortunately moving them farther apart. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable solution that can effectively address the issue. The imperative need is for restraint so as to avoid provocation and unilateral actions and to enable a return to the peace process. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

We express our deep concern about the activities of outlaw, radicalized and extremist groups in the Middle East region, especially in the northern parts of Iraq and Syria, which are critically impacting peace and stability in the region. The violence perpetrated against civilians, especially against women and children, on the basis of religion, ethnicity and sectarianism strikes at our common humanity. All parties and stakeholders in the region must undertake efforts to curb those dangerous trends. We believe that the consolidation of political processes and solutions, while building durable State institutions, will be an effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.

We are also concerned at instances of the targeting of United Nations peacekeepers in the region by outlaw terrorist groups. The Security Council resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups operating in the region must be fully implemented. The early and effective prosecution of such groups is essential. Only such action endorsed by the Council will deter such groups in other parts of the world from committing acts of terror.

Mrs. Schwalger took the Chair.

With new flash points, such as in Yemen, the Middle East region is becoming more volatile, and the stability of the region is being threatened. Besides having implications for peace and stability as well as for the humanitarian situation, the conflicts also impose serious economic costs on the region and the whole world. Particularly with major shipping lines passing through the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, the situation in Yemen has a considerable impact on the cost of shipping, and in turn on regional and global trade, apart from the pressing humanitarian situation and the loss of lives we are witnessing. We therefore urge all parties in Yemen to return to the negotiating table forthwith.

India welcomed the conclusion of the negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iran nuclear question on 14 July. Now the Security Council has also endorsed the Plan of Action. India has maintained that diplomatic dialogue is the only effective way to resolve issues.

On Syria, we reiterate our support for a Syrian-led, comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis, in alignment with the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). The humanitarian crisis arising out of the situation has to be addressed effectively. It is with that conviction that we pledged and contributed $2 million to the United Nations Syrian humanitarian assistance response plan in 2014, and pledged another $2 million during the third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria held in March in Kuwait. We are also hopeful for and supportive of the efforts made by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. de Mistura, aimed at carrying the political process forward. We urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and

to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpretation may be provided properly.

I also wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the President for convening this very important debate. We would also like to thank the Malaysian delegation, which served as President of the Council in June.

I speak as one of the major concerned parties under this agenda item.

A number of delegations' statements have been dominated by a strong dose of surrealism and lack of contact with reality. Those statements have not respected the reference points under the mandate given to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The Special Coordinator chose this morning to avoid dealing with Yemen, Libya and Iraq and to completely ignore the importance of taking up the occupied Syrian Golan, which is at the heart of the mandate and the agenda item. The regional mandate for establishing the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) was outlined in the Secretary-General's report on the expansion of the mission's operations. Under that regional mandate, as noted on the UNSCO website, the Special Coordinator:

(*spoke in English*)

> "will encompass previous functions and also be the focal for overall United Nations assistance to the Middle East peace process. The Special Coordinator's dual diplomatic and United Nations development assistance coordination functions will principally cover Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian authorities areas."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

In distorting the point of the agenda item and while attempting to reduce the pressure on Israel, our colleague the representative of the United States departed from the rules of diplomacy to transform her statement into a sort of press release, with aggressive remarks directed against my country, littered with mistakes and doubtful claims from her country's intelligence services. She did so rather than focus on the content of the agenda item, which is to bring peace and put an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories so as to create a Palestinian State. I would like to take this opportunity to also remind my United States colleague that Vice-President Biden, when meeting recently with university students, said that the United States' problem in Syria was that allies in the region were sponsoring terrorism there.

The United Nations has a historic, legal and moral responsibility to implement the relevant resolutions in order to settle the conflict so that an independent Palestinian State can be established, fully sovereign, on its national territory, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 181 (II) A and B, of 1947, and Security Council resolution 69 (1949), which determined the conditions for Israel's membership in the United Nations. Those conditions are that Israel must honour the resolution that created the Palestinian State and honour General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 1948, relating to the return of Palestinian refugees to their land. However, that is the opposite of what has happened. The United Nations has implemented just half of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) A and B, for the creation of Israel in Palestine. The United Nations has forgotten the returns question found in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 1948, which has increased the injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people, whose fate has become that of being held hostage to a ferocious racist occupation, unprecedented in modern history. At the same time, Israel launched aggressive attacks, one after the other, against the peoples and countries of the region, with the unprecedented military, political and economic support of its sponsors and protectors, who always call for freedom and democracy and justice, albeit a false one.

The successive Governments of Israel have committed crimes against humanity and war crimes, as described in United Nations reports. There is no doubt that Israel's settlement activities have always been a primary policy of all Israeli Governments, even though such activities undermine peace — as all are aware, including Israel's sponsors — and any possibility of creating a geographically contiguous and viable Palestinian State and guaranteeing Palestinians their right to self-determination.

If we truly want to eliminate the possibility of war, end the bloodshed and strengthen the possibility

of peace in the region and the fight against terrorism through a serious international alliance, the United Nations must seriously endeavour, in coordination with the sponsoring countries, to revive the peace process. Our region will never see stability without the achievement of a peaceful, just and holistic solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Some of the delegations that claim to support the rights of the Syrian people have rushed to demand the convening of meetings and conferences and parallel meetings, attempting to confirm fallacious accounts regarding the situation in Syria. Representatives of those countries have used the dramatic aspects of those accounts in addressing the rights of the Syrian people, while avoiding any mention of ending the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, in support of which the Council adopted resolution 497 (1981). It might even seem that recovering the occupied Golan Heights was not one of the rights of the Syrian people and that the Golan Heights was not an occupied Syrian territory, on behalf of which various resolutions have been adopted each year requesting Israel to withdraw from the area to the 4 June 1967 borders.

What do those delegations think of human rights and international humanitarian law? What do they think of the Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights and the suffering of the Syrian citizens there, who have been suffering under the occupation now for more than half a century? Those delegations deny the oppression practiced by Israel and the theft of the Golan's natural resources. What do they think of the natural gas in the area? What do they think of the oil? What do they think of the water? What do they think about the Syrian citizens who are being held in Israeli prisons, in violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions? In that regard, we must mention Sidqi Al-Maqt, known as the Syrian Mandela, who suffered for 27 years in an Israeli prison.

During the current crisis in Syria, Israel has added a new chapter to its record number of human rights violations. It has been supporting terrorists in the separation zone of the Syrian Golan and providing them with an opportunity to be treated in Israeli hospitals. At the same time, it is violating the separation agreements of 1974, imperilling the lives of the members of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and violating the 1948 agreements.

The truth has been brought to light in the report of the Secretary-General on UNDOF and reports in the Israeli media. Israel has allowed free reign to the Al-Nusra Front to launch attacks against the Golan Heights, including the killing of 21 civilians in the village of Hadar, as well as threatening some civilians and forcing others to reject the support of the Syrian Government. Such terrorist movements have more freedom to manoeuvre owing to the situation, which requires serious and immediate action.

We congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran on achieving a final agreement with the P5+1. It is a historic agreement that strengthens the importance of diplomacy and political and friendly solutions to resolving international differences. Absent in the is the language of intimidation, war and aggression and the imposition of illegal sanctions such as those that have targeted the people of Iran for many years, thereby depriving them of their right to possess the knowledge necessary to use technology to enhance their well-being and promote prosperity.

Syria reiterates the inalienable rights of the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, especially as contained in article IV thereof, to acquire nuclear technology to "develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes".

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating New Zealand on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. We wish you, Ma'am President, and your delegation, every success in your efforts. We also thank the New Zealand presidency for convening this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand for his presence in the Council earlier today and for presiding over today's meeting. We also thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

One year after the launch of the Israeli aggression campaign targeting Gaza, the Palestinian people and the international community continue to aspire to the hope that the Council will work towards ensuring that justice is done and that the perpetrators of the crimes carried out during the Israeli campaign are held

accountable for their actions. That campaign lasted 51 days, leaving 2,251 Palestinians dead, the majority of whom were civilians, including 551 children. The campaign also destroyed approximately 12,000 homes and damaged over 4,000 others; it also damaged or destroyed 540 schools and 73 clinics and hospitals. The Palestinian people always suffer the repercussions of such aggression. In fact 100,000 people are now internally displaced in Gaza, owing to the aggression and the ongoing blockade, which has hindered the delivery of aid.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia holds Israel responsible for the deteriorating situation in Gaza. The suffering imposed by Israel will not end as long as the international community and the Security Council have not required Israel to end its aggression and its racist and oppressive colonial policies against the Palestinian people. We must not forget those victims. We must not forget the tens of thousands of wounded and the hundreds of children who became orphans last summer. We must not forget that Gaza is continuing to suffer a humanitarian crisis as a result of the aggression and the blockade imposed by Israel, which clearly violates international law.

Israel's policies will lead only to destruction and to the end to any hope of achieving a just solution to the Palestinian cause that will guarantee the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy.

The report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council reiterates that Israel violated international law and perpetrated crimes that could be considered war crimes in carrying out its aggression against Gaza. Israel has targeted residential areas and used wide-impact explosive weapons to target residential areas, hospital, schools and shelters. The report makes it clear that Israel has systematically used destruction as a weapon of war. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia underscores the importance of Israel's being duly held to account for the crimes it perpetrated during the attack on Gaza and for the war crimes that it continues to perpetrate against the Palestinian people.

My country finds it strange that Israel is not to be found on the list contained in the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, known as the blacklist. My country believes that this represents a double standard in the report of the Secretary-General, which sets out the number of people killed. Palestinian children represent the third-highest number of children killed since 2014. The number of schools destroyed in Palestine is the highest in all of the conflict situations 2014. We therefore believe that we need to objectively and impartially document what has happened and ensure that justice is done and that no double standards come into play.

Bringing about peace and security in the region and achieving comprehensive peace requires that justice be done and that Israel be held accountable for the crimes it has been perpetrating since the beginning of the occupation. The Palestinian people continue to suffer under the yoke of the Israeli occupation. Israel continues to act with complete impunity and to hamper the course of justice, which has required the State of Palestine, with the support of the international community, to resort to the International Criminal Court in order to obtain the justice that it has been denied for so many decades now.

Palestine is a party to the Rome Statute, and we commend this peaceful step. We also look forward to the accession of the State of Palestine to the United Nations as a fully sovereign State in the near future. The Israeli acts of aggression against the people of Palestine are one of the principal reasons for the continuation of the conflict and the death of any hope to try to find a lasting solution to the Palestinian situation. Israel continues to impose arbitrary obstacles on Palestinians who wish to go to the Al-Aqsa mosque to pray. We condemn the fact that Israel is preventing Muslims from exercising their legitimate right to pray at the Al-Aqsa mosque. Israel bears full responsibility for the deterioration in the situation in Jerusalem, and all of the negative consequences of the racist Israeli policies in Jerusalem are to be condemned.

We condemn also all attempts to try to change the historic and religious identity and legal status of places of worship, and we call on Israel to immediately halt all actions leading to a demographic transformation of the city of Jerusalem, including the settlement process, the destruction of Palestinian homes, the deprivation of the Palestinians of their right to a residence, and their eviction from their homes in contravention of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

My country supports all international efforts to adopt a resolution that seeks a final solution to the

Palestinian cause and bring to an end the occupation, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and resolutions of international legality, so as to create a Palestinian State in keeping with the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Four years after the beginning of the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, Syria continues to be one of the most serious humanitarian disasters of this century. The Syrian authorities continue to intimidate, starve, kill and destroy the Syrian people. That complete lack of humanity and the proliferation of terrorism has led the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to condemn the presence of armed foreign terrorist fighters in Syria, including Hizbullah and other sectarian parties coming from abroad. We must combat terrorism by finding solutions to its root causes.

The Syrian authorities have engaged in genocide and marginalization and have deprived the people of their most basic humanitarian rights. We can see what the Syrian authorities are doing with the full support of Hizbullah in the town of Zabadani, where the Syrian authorities have used more than 600 barrel bombs in the past three weeks. We urge the Security Council to condemn this aggression and to call on the Syrian authorities to stop targeting civilians. We call on the Council to condemn the crimes perpetrated in Qalamoun by Hizbullah and other sectarian parties coming from abroad. We call on the Council to put an end to the bloodshed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Council can no longer fail to uphold its responsibility to resolve the Syrian crisis if it is to retain its credibility. The Council's silence regarding what is happening in Syria helps the Syrian authorities in their actions, which target civilians with violence and weapons.

We join the call to hold accountable all those who have used weapons of mass destruction against the Syrian people, including barrel bombs, missiles and toxic gases. The perpetrators of such crimes, whatever their political affiliation or motivation, must stand trial. My country is committed to helping the Syrian people to achieve their aspirations in a way that preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the rights of its children, whatever their faith or ethnicity.

We call on the Security Council to commit to the implementation of its relevant resolutions and to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, and to fully implement the Geneva communiqué, which calls for the creation of a transitional authority.

The President: I call on the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me start by thanking the Foreign Minister of New Zealand for earlier presiding over this meeting. We also thank the Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for the Middle East Peace Process for his comprehensive though sobering briefing.

Peace in the Middle East appears more distant than ever. The inflexible and indefensible posture taken by the hard-line Israeli Government has frozen any prospect for the resumption of the peace process and a political resolution based on a two-State solution. Israeli extremism is evoking a matching turn towards further radicalization in Gaza and the West Bank.

Earlier this month we marked the first anniversary of the 51-day Israeli military assault on Gaza. The devastation that it caused has left Gaza in ruins.

The report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council on the Gaza conflict is an eye-opener. It establishes that security concerns cannot relieve Israel of its obligations under international law. It also expresses concern at the impunity that prevails across the board for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by Israeli forces. These forces refused to change course despite knowledge of the massive death and destruction being caused by their actions in Gaza. This, the Commission concludes, may even amount to war crimes.

The persistent lack of implementation of recommendations regarding violations made by similar previous Commissions all but guarantee their systematic recurrence. This impunity must end. The full implementation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation-sponsored and Pakistan-steered Human Rights Council resolution of 1 July 2015 would, we hope, be a step towards ending this cycle of impunity.

The devastation of Gaza, mind you, is but one aspect of the daily hardships that the Palestinians face as a result of Israeli oppression. The eight-year blockade of Gaza, the detention regime, excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians and illegal settlements all continue unabated and unchecked. It is heartbreaking that of the more than 12,500 houses that were completely destroyed in Gaza not a single one has so far been rebuilt.

The international community must act to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza, especially because it shares part of the blame. We collectively have not lived up to our promises. Only 28 per cent of the amount pledged at the Cairo Conference in October 2014 has so far been disbursed.

We believe that the path to sustainable peace in the Middle East can only lie in a two-State solution and an end to Israeli occupation of all Arab lands. This body, as the prime custodian of international peace and security, must take its responsibility seriously. We call on the Security Council to adopt a resolution setting timelines and parameters for establishing an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. An international mechanism to steer the process is also imperative.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) poses a spreading threat to security across the Middle East, North Africa and even beyond. A purely military approach is neither sufficient nor permanent in its impact. A comprehensive military, political, economic and social strategy is needed to defeat a movement that is motivated by an ideology of hate and gruesome violence.

In Iraq, ISIS must be confronted and rolled back. That should be achieved by the State, not by sectarian militias. Success will come about only if the minority population is fully assured of its safety and its human rights. Durable peace can be achieved through political solutions, not just military engagements.

Syria continues to bleed profusely. Apart from defeating ISIS, a serious search for a political solution in Syria is needed. We welcome the consultations on Syria undertaken by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in Geneva. We look forward to the comprehensive peace plan that he will present and hope that it will garner the support of parties to the conflict as well as of the international community. Dialogue, we believe, is the only way out of that quagmire.

In Yemen, Pakistan is concerned that the humanitarian pause has not held. We urge parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table. The legitimate Government of Yemen must be restored. That effort should be led by diplomacy and engagement.

Finally, my country welcomes the landmark agreement recently reached with Iran, which, if fully and sincerely implemented, can contribute not only to nuclear non-proliferation but also to regional stability, cooperation and economic growth. That would also open the way for closer consultations and even agreement on how to address pressing regional challenges, which, at the end of the day, require regional responses.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I thank New Zealand for convening this important open debate, as well as Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing. Brazil also wishes to acknowledge the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

Today's exercise is happening against the backdrop of increasing tensions and threats to international peace and security in different parts of the region. Violent extremism conducive to international terrorism is on the rise, spreading fear, violating human rights and international humanitarian law, and adding greater complexity to the task of bringing peace and stability to the region.

We remain deeply troubled by the fact that the peace process between Israel and Palestine is paralysed. The international community must not be idle, as each day we watch the violence increase and the viability of the two-State solution dwindle as a result of the continuous expansion of Israeli settlements.

One year after the latest conflict, the situation in Gaza remains deeply distressing. It is appalling to learn that in the past 15 years the number of people in Gaza requiring humanitarian assistance has undergone a ten-fold increase, from 80,000 in 2000 to 890,000 in 2015.

Under such circumstances, accepting the status quo is simply not an option. We reiterate our call for the Security Council to fully carry out its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and actively support and steer the peace process. It is our collective responsibility to bring about a renewed negotiating process that will promptly lead to a two-State solution. We welcome multilateral initiatives, such as the one led by France in the Security Council on the relaunching of peace talks.

Turning to Syria, after more than three years since the adoption of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), we are deeply disturbed that the prospects for success in resolving the conflict remain elusive. The indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population,

including the use of chemical substances and barrel bombs as weapons, are simply unacceptable. All parties to the conflict must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including by providing safe, full and unimpeded access to humanitarian agencies, taking into account the relevant Security Council resolutions.

There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. It is high time for the parties to engage genuinely in political negotiations aimed at ending the conflict. We reaffirm our support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and look forward to hearing his recommendations on the implementation of the Geneva communiqué based on the consultations he held with several parties during the past weeks. We also appreciate the efforts by the Russian Federation to promote dialogue between the parties.

Once again, we commend the outstanding generosity of many countries in the region, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, which have been receiving the bulk of the Syrian refugees. Brazil has also contributed to the humanitarian efforts by issuing more than 7,000 entry visas for Syrian residents affected by the crisis and by providing food and medicine to help alleviate the dire situation faced by refugees and displaced people in the region.

We support the efforts by the Lebanese Government to overcome the difficulties caused by the spillover of the war in Syria. In that regard, Brazil urges all the relevant political actors to make every effort to end the presidential vacuum in Lebanon. We are convinced that such a development would further strengthen the country in the face of the current political and security challenges. We also firmly support the policy of dissociation from regional crises agreed to in the Baabda Declaration of June 2012.

Despite those serious challenges in the Middle East, there is reason for hope. We would like to conclude this statement by once again expressing Brazil's great satisfaction with the recent conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme and its unanimous endorsement by the Security Council, which we certainly welcome. We congratulate all parties to the agreement for the political will, persistence and determination shown throughout the complex and highly sensitive negotiating process. Those qualities will also be crucial for the implementation of the agreement.

Brazil has always supported diplomatic efforts aimed at ensuring the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme and the normalization of Iran's relations with the international community, including through the 2010 Tehran Declaration. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action demonstrates the effectiveness of diplomacy in bridging differences and creating truly sustainable peace.

We are confident that the success achieved in Vienna will significantly contribute to the launching of a new and productive phase in the relations between Iran and the other parties to the agreement. The agreement has the potential to help reduce international and regional tensions for the benefit of the entire international community. Brazil expresses its readiness to continue to collaborate through diplomatic means for the furtherance of stability, peace and prosperity of the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Stener (Norway): Norway also welcomes the recent historic agreement between the P5+1 and Iran on the Iranian nuclear programme. We stand ready to assist and support the International Atomic Energy Agency in the important and demanding task of monitoring the implementation of the agreement. There is hope that the agreement will open a window for settling other pressing issues in the region.

For more than a year, the efforts towards realizing a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been suspended. Now is the time for the international community to find concerted ways to aid the parties in reinvigorating the peace process. Norway welcomes the European Union initiative to discuss how to broaden support for the process. The Security Council should also explore how it may be of assistance.

Norway believes that an important way of preparing the ground for a renewed process is to strengthen the Palestinian economy and further improve the Palestinian institutions of governance. The sustainability of those institutions has been severely threatened by the restricted economic space. Improved market access is key for the Palestinian economy to thrive.

Norway therefore appeals to Israel to increase its efforts — working together with the Palestinian Authority and within the arrangements established by the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol — to settle

outstanding problems, increase space for Palestinian economic activity and improve the financial sustainability of the Palestinian Authority, which needs more support from its donors. To follow up on the technical meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) in Brussels on 27 May, Norway will convene a meeting of the AHLC at the ministerial level here in New York in September. The objective is to address the challenges and provide the necessary political guidance for further donor efforts. We appeal to the parties to avoid provocative measures. A freeze on the Israeli plans to demolish the Palestinian village of Susiya would be taken as a measure of goodwill.

There are positive developments in the reconstruction work in Gaza, but progress is still far too slow in terms of access, funding and the unification of the administration. Norway notes with satisfaction that Israel has allowed increased volumes of imported goods to enter, and that Egypt has extended the opening of the Rafah crossing. We call on Israel to further lift the restrictions on access to Gaza. We also call on donors to honour the pledges they made at the Cairo International Conference on Gaza Reconstruction, and we call on the Palestinians to renew their efforts to reunite the administrations of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.

We were horrified by the bomb attack in Diyala province in Iraq, and again in Turkey, where young people on an idealistic mission of peace and reconstruction were brutally targeted. Recently, victims of terrorism have included tourists on a beach in Tunisia and worshippers in a mosque in Kuwait.

In Iraq, we have seen progress in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but clear challenges remain. Non-sectarian messages should seek to counter the forces fuelling sectarian fears and actions. Iraqi Prime Minister Al Abadi should be commended for his efforts in that regard. We encourage the Iraqi Government to further step up its reconciliation efforts and to give all of Iraq's constituent communities a real stake in the future of the State. The struggle against ISIL will take time. As villages and towns in Iraq and Syria are liberated, it is important that the rule of law and respect for human rights replace the rule of terror.

The situation in Syria is becoming ever more desperate and fragmented. The regional and international parties involved must intensify their efforts to find a political solution to the armed conflict. Norway supports all efforts to that end, particularly the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. But the United Nations Envoy can only make progress on the issues that the Council agrees on. Therefore, each Member State bears a great responsibility to seek unifying action, to work with the parties and to pave the way towards a political solution. Norway also calls for full and safe access for humanitarian actors to all Syrian people in need.

Finally, spearheaded by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya, Mr. Bernadino León, the Skhirat agreement is a critical first step towards ending the armed conflict in Libya. Norway strongly urges the party that was absent in Skhirat to address outstanding concerns through the remaining annex negotiations. The final agreement must be founded on broad Libyan consensus in order to stand a real chance of successful implementation.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Hallergard: I thank New Zealand, and in particular the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, for convening and presiding over this meeting. I also thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and hard and good work on this difficult theme.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union remains committed to a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, whose viability is, however, constantly being eroded by new facts on the ground. We urge both parties to demonstrate their stated commitment to a two-State solution through concrete actions. The European Union will actively support them to create an environment of trust necessary to engage in meaningful negotiations as soon as possible.

An immediate priority must be to address the grave situation in Gaza. All international community pledges should be honoured. We are also concerned over the severe lack of funds being faced by the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's, and call on all concerned donors to step up their funding.

The European Union believes that compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law by States and non-State actors, including accountability, is a cornerstone for peace and security in the region.

We welcome recent steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in Gaza. Further positive measures are now needed for the full delivery of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and economic recovery on a permanent basis. We call for a fundamental change in the political, security and economic situation in Gaza, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while still addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Recent rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable and underlines again the danger of escalation. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace. We call on all parties to agree on a durable ceasefire that prevents a return to conflict, strengthens Gaza as an integral part of a future Palestinian State and reinforces the link between Gaza and the West Bank.

The European Union urges all Palestinian factions to find common ground, based on non-violence and reconciliation, and to work together to address the needs of the Palestinian population. We call on the Palestinian factions to make reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza a top priority. The Authority must take greater responsibility in that regard and assume all Government functions in Gaza. The European Union is ready to provide full support to those efforts.

We are committed to working with all sides so as to allow the socioeconomic development of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and empower Palestinian institutions in preparation for statehood. We stress that actions such as the easing of restrictions must be part of a fundamental change of policy with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on Israel to enable accelerated Palestinian construction, as well as social and economic development in Area C. We furthermore call on the Israeli authorities to halt plans for the forced transfer of the population and the demolition of Palestinian housing and infrastructure in the Susiya and Abu Nwar communities.

The preservation of the viability of a two-State solution is at the core of EU policy. In that regard, while recalling that the settlements are illegal under international law, the European Union reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and the actions taken in that context, such as building the separation barrier beyond the 1967 line, demolitions and confiscation — including of EU-funded projects — evictions, forced transfers — including of Bedouins — illegal outposts, settler violence and restrictions on movement and access. Those actions seriously threaten the two-State solution. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. We will continue to closely monitor developments on the ground and their broader implications, and we remain ready to take further action in order to protect the viability of the two-State solution. The EU and its member States reaffirm their commitment to ensuring the continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. We express our commitment to ensure that, in line with international law, all agreements between the State of Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

Securing a just and lasting peace will require an increased common international effort. The European Union will work actively on a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The establishment of an international support group is a possible way to contribute to that goal. The EU's position on parameters, as set out in its Foreign Affairs Council conclusions of July 2014, provides a basis for achieving consensus on the way forward. The European Union is ready to engage in joint work with regional partners on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, and welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Quartet in that regard.

A lasting solution to the conflict in Syria is urgently required. We fully support the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to revive a political process. We hope the Geneva consultations will help launch a Syrian-led inclusive political process leading to a transition, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) and in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Our ultimate objective is to help build a democratic and pluralistic

Syria. That political approach is at the heart of the EU regional strategy for Syria, Iraq and the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or Daesh. In Iraq, the EU will continue to work closely with the Government, supporting it as much as we can in its efforts to restore inclusive governance and stability. In Syria, an inclusive political transition is crucial to sustainable peace and stability. All Member States, in accordance with resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), should take decisive action to stop the flow of foreign fighters and to counter ISIL/Daesh financing and combat its incitement. The Al-Assad regime's brutal war against its own people, massive human rights violations, and systematic obstruction against democratic reforms have contributed to the flourishing of ISIL/Daesh in Syria. As a consequence of its policies and actions, the Al-Assad regime cannot be a partner in the fight against Daesh.

More than 220,000 Syrians have been killed and more than half of the population is displaced. Peace will remain elusive in Syria as long as impunity reigns. The perpetrators of violations and abuses must be held to account. In a letter dated 18 June, 71 countries, including all EU member States, expressed their outrage at the never-ending state of unchecked brutality in Syria, in particular through the systematic use of barrel bombs. The Arria Formula meeting convened by France and Spain on 26 June clearly showed the Council the terrible toll exacted on civilians by the Al-Assad regime's widespread use of barrel bombs. We strongly condemn those indiscriminate attacks, as well as the continued besieging of civilian areas, the use of the starvation of civilians as a combat method and the arbitrary detention and torture of thousands of Syrians. We believe it is high time for the Council to follow up on its own resolutions, including resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), and to take decisive action to put an end to these ongoing violations of international law and the Council's resolutions.

We are equally concerned about the frequent reports that toxic chemicals such as chlorine have been used as weapons in Syria. The use of chlorine gas as a weapon is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as of resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015). Both resolutions foresaw further measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in case of non-compliance. We strongly support the initiative being discussed in the Council to establish an attribution mechanism through a joint investigative mechanism of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

I would like to conclude by stressing the EU's determination to continue supporting the Syrians and the refugee-hosting countries in the region affected by the crisis, particularly Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Overall, the European Union has mobilized more than €3.7 billion since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. At the third Kuwait pledging conference, on 31 March, the European Union and its member States pledged close to €1.1 billion.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and to convey the Movement's appreciation to New Zealand and its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Murray McCully, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this critical juncture for Palestine, the Palestinian people and the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the United Nations Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his informative briefing.

The Non-Aligned Movement would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people and to reiterate its support for their realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including self-determination and freedom in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along with a just solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We should keep in mind that the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly contain the fundamental principles for a just, lasting and peaceful solution. The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for more than 67 years, almost as long as the Organization has existed, so it is not for lack of attention that the conflict and its injustices continue. That is due rather to a lack of political will and the Security Council's repeated failure to uphold its responsibilities, leaving the Palestinian people with little hope of realizing their right to self-determination and freedom and the justice and peace they have been denied for so long.

Despite decades of the Palestinian people's good-faith participation in peace efforts and a clear commitment by them and their leadership to international law, reaffirmed by Palestine's recent accession to several international conventions and treaties, Palestine's plight and predicament have worsened on all fronts. That is directly owing to Israel's illegal policies and practices, which have entrenched the occupation, caused widespread suffering and flagrantly undermined all peace efforts, to a point where the viability of a two-State solution has been cast into grave doubt.

As we witness escalating breaches by Israel, the occupying Power, of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, we stress that it is high time for the international community to take a decisive and historic step towards ending the occupation of Palestinian lands and paving the way for a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict. In doing so, the Council would be fulfilling its duty under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security and make a genuine contribution to a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and remains a source of grave concern for the region and the international community and for the prospects for global peace and stability.

This time last year, Israel was carrying out an act of military aggression against the besieged Gaza Strip that lasted for 51 days, during which it inflicted widespread death, injury and trauma on Palestine's civilian population and massive destruction of their homes and infrastructure. According to the report of the Human Rights Council's Independent Commission of Inquiry, the scale of the devastation in Gaza was unprecedented, and serious violations of international humanitarian law, in some cases amounting to war crimes, were committed by the Israeli occupying forces. According to the Secretary-General's summary of the Board of Inquiry report (S/2015/286) into certain incidents affecting schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as a result of Israeli actions during the 2014 conflict, at least 44 Palestinians were killed and 227 injured at seven UNRWA schools that were used as emergency shelters.

The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) states that at least 540 Palestinian children were killed during the conflict, and 2,955 were injured. At least 262 schools, 274 kindergartens and 17 hospitals in Gaza were damaged, while only three schools were damaged in Israel. That report concludes that the unprecedented and unacceptable scale of the impact on children in 2014 raises grave concerns about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, notably the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack, and respect for international human rights law, particularly in relation to the excessive use of force.

Israel has not been held accountable for those crimes, despite the fact that the occupying forces launched tens of thousands of missiles, bombs, artillery shells and live ammunition against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population in a brutal onslaught that killed more than 2,200 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, including hundreds of children and women; injured more than 11,000 people; displaced hundreds of thousands; and terrorized the entire population.

It is unacceptable that this humanitarian disaster, deliberately inflicted on the Palestinian people by the occupying Power, remains without redress and that, one year later, not a single home of the more than 12,000 homes completely destroyed has been rebuilt, as the illegal Israeli blockade continues to obstruct reconstruction; more than 100,000 people remain homeless; and socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate, as Gaza continues to be suffocated by the blockade and isolated from the rest of Palestine and the entire world. It is unacceptable that Israeli impunity persists without consequence. There can be no justification for such inhumanity and criminality. We appeal to the Security Council once again to uphold its Charter and moral duties and act to redress this injustice.

The Security Council must also act to address Israel's ongoing illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Council's own resolutions. How can the Council remain silent as Israel continues, deliberately and systematically, its settlement and wall construction and the confiscation and de facto annexation of Palestinian land, destroying the possibility of realizing the two-State solution for peace? Those and other systematic violations — including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including

at sensitive religious sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem — have persisted unabated, worsening the already fragile situation on the ground, and must be addressed immediately to avert further destabilization and to salvage the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines in the quest to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. NAM once again urges the Security Council to act forthwith to end the plight of the Palestinian people with resolute action towards ending the Israeli occupation, supporting the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and establishing peace and security so as to put an end to this prolonged conflict that has so severely destabilized the region and undermined international law and our international system as a whole.

NAM believes that the message is clear worldwide. It is high time to end this abhorrent Israeli occupation and the impunity that has brought so much suffering, has caused so many crises, sown so much instability and anger throughout the Middle East, and continues to undermine regional and global peace and security. The position of NAM vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine as a whole is clear and strong, as reflected in its summits and ministerial declarations over the decades. NAM will therefore not relent in calling on the Security Council to act in accordance with its Charter duties, its resolutions and the applicable provisions of international law that provide the solution to the conflict. We stress the important role to be played by the NAM caucus members of the Council in this regard and call for active engagement to uphold our collective responsibilities for finding a solution.

Lebanon continues to suffer from consecutive Israeli violation of its borders and incursion into its territory, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese airspace, intensifying its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking the presidency of New Zealand for convening this open debate. My delegation also welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, and thanks him for presiding over the debate earlier today. Our gratitude also goes to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his useful briefing.

Before I make a few remarks in my national capacity, I wish to align myself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We are meeting at a bleak time in the situation in the Middle East, which needs a fresh and closer look as well as renewed commitment, especially from the Security Council, to address the problem in an integrated manner, not only on the political front, but also from the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. Allow me to focus on the issue of Palestine.

Indonesia's advocacy of the rights of the Palestinian people is a long and unflinching one. We support their right to live in peace as one people in a State of their own. To that end, we strongly stand by the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. In that regard, we are pleased by the growing recognition of the State of Palestine by various countries and entities, the accession of Palestine to various international treaties and its admission to international organizations. We consistently support Palestine's efforts towards its eventual full membership

in the United Nations, which will make Palestine an equal member of the community of sovereign States.

Indonesia is deeply concerned about the continued stalemate on the road towards peace. We stress the urgent need to revive the peace process, and possibly the convening of an international conference to deliberate on the issue. In that connection, the need to review the role and mandate of the Quartet has also become glaring. Indonesia supports ideas and initiatives that set a framework for the resumption of the peace process and include clear parameters and a time frame. We believe that such ideas and initiatives have the potential to give us a new opportunity and approach to break the impasse in the peace process.

There are clearly deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is now one year since Israel's last assault on Gaza in 2014. When it was over, well over 2,200 Palestinians were dead. They included more than 550 children and 299 women. The injured, many of them critically, numbered more than 11,000. When the 51 days of bombardment ended, much of Gaza lay in ruins, with critical infrastructure — such as schools, roads and hospitals — levelled to the ground. An unprecedented humanitarian nightmare arose with 100,000 people rendered homeless. Up until today, Gaza has little electricity or water. According to the World Bank, its unemployment is the highest in the world at 43 per cent. Nearly 80 per cent of the population is dependent on aid. The youth of Gaza face a bleak future.

On many occasions, we have called for the reversal of this situation and for the international community to redouble its efforts to prevent the recurrence of Israeli aggression. That includes taking steps to hold accountable those responsible for the aggression that resulted in a great number of casualties among the Palestinian civilian population.

Regrettably, since the ceasefire of 2014, Israeli forces have continued to execute a reign of terror throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel is continuing with its construction of the separation wall, confiscating Palestinian land, demolishing homes and properties, forcibly displacing and evacuating Palestinian families, and shooting and arresting Palestinians, with absolutely no concern for human rights. In addition, Israel is continuing its illegal settlements throughout occupied Palestine, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem, trampling on international law and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* (A/ES-10/273).

Indonesia reiterates its call upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and bring the conflict to an end without further delay. The Council should renew efforts towards the resumption of the peace process, beginning with ensuring the compliance of Israel with the relevant international laws and United Nations resolutions, particularly those of the Council. We believe that the extensive work of various organs and bodies within the United Nations with regard to finding a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian conflict would add value in that regard.

Lastly, my delegation wishes to welcome the agreement reached by the P5+1 with the Islamic Republic of Iran on its nuclear programme. That is indeed a historic achievement, which we hope will create momentum for the international community to make progress in finding a comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East. We call on the Council to capitalize on that momentum in order to boost its endeavours to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Peace has eluded the Middle East for too long, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we discharge this historic burden.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to welcome the presence among us earlier today at this important debate of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully. We would also like to congratulate the delegation of New Zealand on its very able leadership of the Council and all the work that it has been doing throughout the month of July while exercising its presidency of the Security Council. We also are grateful for the briefing made by the United Nations Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, on recent events in the Middle East. We have taken due note of the content of his briefing.

A year ago, we witnessed the beginning of what turned out to be the latest round of conflict between Palestinian armed groups and the Israel security forces. We also saw the launching of Operation Protective

Edge in Gaza by Israel. Those actions led to some of the worst fighting seen in Gaza since 1967. Still today, we continue to see the aftermath of those acts, particularly the suffering and pain that they have caused to the civilian population.

The various reports published by the United Nations clearly spell out to the reader the levels of violence that were reached during the conflict. For example, in the report published by the Independent Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council, we saw underscored the unprecedented devastation as well as the serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law caused by Israel and Palestinian armed groups, actions which in some cases could be equated to war crimes.

In addition, in the Secretary-General's summary of the report of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry on various incidents that had occurred in Gaza which affected schools administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, we see clear evidence of the attacks and abuses committed against United Nations schools that were being used as emergency shelters.

Moreover, in one of the most alarming reports, the report (S/2015/409) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, we are confronted with the statistic of the number of Palestinian children murdered in 2014, a number higher than the number of children who died in the Syrian Arab Republic and in Darfur. There can be no doubt that the situation is unsustainable.

In addition to all that I have just detailed, we need to add the precarious economic situation that persists in Gaza, an area in which the unemployment rate is the highest in the world, standing at 44 per cent. Although it could be said that some progress has been made in the reconstruction of Gaza following the lifting of some restrictions, the blockade imposed by Israel continues to heavily impact upon the viability of this people.

The situation in the West Bank has been further complicated by the increasing number of clashes between Palestinian protesters and the Israeli security forces, alongside the expansion in settlements and the forced displacement of Palestinians from Area C in East Jerusalem. In a similar vein, following a period of relative calm, the number of sporadic rocket attacks launched from Gaza targeting Israel has also increased.

For all those reasons, it is essential that we establish a political time line that responds to the legitimate needs of both peoples that would allow us to arrive at a lasting and just agreement. It is for that reason, and to avoid a repetition of the conflict that we saw a year ago, that the international community has to play a key role in supporting and driving forward the peace process in the region.

We recognize the value of the principle of shared responsibility, and therefore believe that the active participation of both the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East and the Security Council in the peace process can, and should, serve to revitalize the process so that the parties are able to take responsible steps towards a broad, just and lasting peace. We urge the Council to debate the Arab Peace Initiative, which sets out a vision for a global solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, as well as the key role that can be played by countries in the region and the Security Council.

Parties should avoid adopting measures that will hinder still further perspectives for a renewal of meaningful talks. We see the parties as being those who are principally interested in making a genuine and renewed effort, which would include, inter alia, the total lifting of the blockade, a halt in the construction of illegal settlements, a halt in the carrying out of provocative acts and the cessation of the launching of rockets, all of which should be done in order to guarantee the legitimate security concerns of Israel. It is essential that parties continue to build trust between themselves and that they commit to the option of peace talks and the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine coexisting side by side in conditions of peace and security, and both adopting measures aimed at rebuilding mutual trust.

Very briefly, I should like to refer to the very serious humanitarian situation and the risks posed to economic and social development caused by the various conflicts in the Middle East region.

Over the last few years, we have borne witness to the havoc caused by war and the rise in violence in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as the poverty into which the civilian population has been thrown. We would like to point to the invaluable support extended by peoples and Governments of countries neighbouring Syria, in particular Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt, which have sought to alleviate somewhat the circumstances of these persons. But the burden they have shouldered is too great and it is crucial that the international community support them in their development goals so that they can maintain their domestic stability, given

that this is a cornerstone for guaranteeing peace in the region.

We are aware of the huge challenges that the quest for a political solution, both at the national and international level, might pose to the parties. But this is the only path open to us. It is our political and historical responsibility as member States of the international community to support those measures that might allow us to achieve such a solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Monsignor Kassas (Holy See): My delegation congratulates the President on New Zealand's presidency of the Security Council this month and commends him for convening this timely open debate.

The Holy See continues to monitor closely the situation in the Middle East, which is deeply afflicted by various conflicts that continue to intensify. Unfortunately, the international community, which seems to have become accustomed to these conflicts, has not yet succeeded in working out a sufficient response.

A particular worry is the situation in Syria, where the dramatic humanitarian situation affecting more than half of the population calls for renewed commitment by all in order to arrive at a political solution to the conflict. We should not continue to look helplessly from the sidelines while a great country is being destroyed. The situation in Syria requires putting aside many particular interests in order to prioritize those of Syria and of the Syrians themselves.

In Syria as well as in Iraq, we continue to be gravely concerned about the terrorist acts perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State. This is a challenge not only for the region but for the entire international community, which is called upon to cooperate with unity of purpose in order to thwart this terrorist plague, which is expanding its activities into different countries.

By having to take care of millions of refugees, Lebanon and Jordan also bear the brunt of the conflict in neighbouring Syria. They urgently need the solidarity of the whole international community. The Holy See hopes that the land of the cedars will be able to resolve, as soon as possible, this period of institutional instability arising largely from the vacancy for more than a year now of the presidency of the country.

While being aware of the sufferings of entire populations, I wish to point out the sufferings that Christians and other minority ethnic and religious groups are suffering, forcing many of them to leave their homes. The diminution of the Christian presence is a grave loss for the entire region, where Christians have been present since the very beginnings of Christianity and where they wish to continue cooperating with their fellow citizens in building harmonious societies and working for the common good as promoters of peace, reconciliation and development.

My delegation wishes to express appreciation for the agreement that has been reached between Iran and the 5+1 group.

On 26 June, the Holy See and the State of Palestine signed the comprehensive agreement that follows the basic agreement between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization of 15 February 2000. That agreement is indicative of the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in recent years, above all in the level of international support it has obtained, as exemplified by General Assembly resolution 67/19, which, among other things, recognizes Palestine as a non-member Observer State. The Holy See hopes that this agreement may in some way promote the achievement of the two-State solution, bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continues to cause suffering to both parties, and that the agreement may offer, within the complex reality of the Middle East, a good example of dialogue and cooperation.

As Pope Francis said during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year:

> "The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders."

In that context, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the peace process can move forward only if it is directly negotiated between the two parties with the support of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I should like to congratulate New Zealand on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We also commend the presidency for convening this meeting on a subject that is of great importance to the Islamic and Arab world.

On a note of hope, I should like to congratulate the Libyans on the negotiations, in which we assisted, in reaching the the Skhirat agreement, which has been ratified and which augurs the possibility of exiting from the Libyan crisis. It is a major accomplishment in Libya's efforts to put an end to the conflict and to help establish a Libyan State that is modern. The people of Libya wish this. My country, inspired by the guidelines from our King, Mohammed VI, supports Libya in trying to reach its aspirations based on the principles of justice and dignity. The people of Libya are entitled to this. The Kingdom will continue in its determination to support Libya in future so that it will be able to recover and regain its status among the nations.

Since the last open debate on the Middle East (see S/PV.7430), no breakthrough has been noted and the economic and social situation for the Palestinians keeps getting worse. The political situation continues to encounter obstacles months after the beginning of negotiations. We deplore the situation in Palestine, in particular in Jerusalem. The legal status of Jerusalem must be protected and must not be threatened, and measures must not be taken to change that status. All of the measures to change it must be considered null and void. It is a place for Christians and Muslims. Our King has said in international meetings that the settlements and Judaization must be condemned as well as attacks on the faithful. In Marrakesh in 2014, the Committee chaired by our King reiterated the principles of a sacred city for Muslims. This is at the heart of a political solution. Attacks against the Al-Aqsa Mosque will lead only to further violence and will serve only to achieve the interests of extremists and those who try to sow the seeds of hatred. The perpetrators of such actions are co-terrorists, to which desperate young people will be drawn if the situation continues as it is.

As part of the efforts by the Arab Ministerial Committee at the summit held at Sharm El-Sheikh in March, Morocco welcomes the efforts of Egypt, a fraternal country, as well as of Jordan, a member of the Council, Palestine and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, all of whom are trying to mobilize international peace efforts for the Palestinian cause and put an end to the occupation according to a determined timetable, so as to establish an independent Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967. A final settlement must also be found on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, the resolutions of the United Nations and the relevant documents. Morocco will continue to support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and along the lines of the 1967 borders, as part of a solution based on two States living side by side in peace and coexistence in line with the Arab Peace Initiative.

In earlier statements to the Council, we warned of the possibility of a conflict in Yemen given the instability and selfishness of the position of certain parties. Some parties are trying to proclaim a fait accompli, in violation of resolutions 2201 (2015) and 2216 (2015). Those parties are attempting to get out of their obligations and ignore the outcome of the National Dialogue, which is leading to an undermining of the political transition process, a flexible process in Yemen. That is leading to a cycle of violence and aggravation of the humanitarian situation in the country. Once again, we call on all the parties in Yemen, including the Houthis, to implement those resolutions, withdraw their forces from all invaded areas and put an end to the violence. We welcome the efforts of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. We call on the Yemeni parties to use wisdom and make sure that the overall interests prevail in order to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

The people of Syria continue to suffer from the repercussions of the crisis in that country. Five years after it began, we still see no ray of hope. The crisis continues to claim lives and produce refugees and internally displaced persons by the millions. Morocco has contributed to the work of the third international donors conference in order to support and help the humanitarian situation. On 31 March in Kuwait, we offered assistance to our Syrian brothers, especially the refugees, to alleviate their suffering. This took the form of a multi-purpose hospital in the Zaatari refugee camp, which King Mohammed VI had been calling for since 2012. The hospital provides therapeutic and medical services on a regular basis to thousands of Syrians.

Morocco will spare no effort to find a political settlement to the crisis in Syria. We believe that the solution in Syria requires dialogue, not war, as well as

finding ways and means to implement the first Geneva communiqué (S/2013/522, annex). My delegation supports the efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura to find a way out of the crisis. We need to protect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

We also support the independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Lebanon. We welcome the responsible national spirit demonstrated by the Lebanese people at the highest levels to protect the security, stability and sovereignty of that country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to congratulate you, Madam President, your delegation and the New Zealand Minister for Foreign Affairs on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. We trust that, under your presidency, the Council's work will be crowned with success during this important phase in the history of the Middle East, which has seen dangerous, fast-moving and, unfortunately, negative developments.

Allow me to focus on the role of the United Nations in general and of the Security Council in particular in addressing the Palestinian question and finding a just solution to the cause of its people. This situation is particularly close to the hearts and minds of all Arabs and all peace-loving countries. It is a cause for which the Council has adopted several resolutions that have so far gone unheeded, for reasons known to everyone. The occupation continues; the larger part of Palestinian territory is under the longest-known military occupation in modern history. No solution has been found for the issues involved in a definitive solution, especially that of the refugees. Millions of Palestinians live in refugee camps or as guests in countries that are not their own, which is a stain on the international community.

We must protect the credibility of the Council, which must work to implement its resolutions, taking a firm approach to support principled diplomacy. This is essential if we are to reach the solution that we hope for. We must pursue negotiations to find a definitive and lasting solution. We need to move away from the path of the last two decades by finding a new creative and innovative solution and ensure that the occupying Power finds the political will to support the negotiations, rather than hindering them. They seem to be hindering them so that they can complete their plan to grab the land of the Palestinian people through their settlement policy, which has been repeatedly denounced as undermining any attempt to find a fair and lasting solution to the problem and to establish a contiguous Palestinian State.

We need to revitalize negotiations, and there must be genuine political will to find a solution. If we continue to adopt measures that we sought to adopt in the past, we will see no concrete and tangible result. As I have said, that will undermind the credibility of the parties, especially those who sponsor negotiations. It is essential to be innovative, to avoid increasing the levels of frustration felt by the Palestinians, which opens the door to the extremism that is one of the root causes of the terrorism that threatens the stability and well-being of many countries in the region and the broader world.

The continuing crisis in the fraternal Syrian Arab Republic is a major challenge for regional security. To date, we see no glimmer of hope for reaching a lasting solution to the crisis. To that end, I would like to reiterate our call for the continuation of Egyptian efforts, together with all parties to the Syrian conflict, in which we will try to enable them to find a legitimate and lasting solution. We call for an end to the Israeli occupation in the Golan, in accordance with the international resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Tsymbaliuk (Ukraine): At the outset, let me thank New Zealand for convening today's open debate, which is a good opportunity for delegations to once again exchange views on the current situation the Middle East, particularly concerning possible ways for settling conflicts or tensions in the region.

While Ukraine has aligned itself with the statement of the European Union, I would like to say a few words in our national capacity.

Ukraine reiterates its commitment to a balanced and impartial approach to the Middle East issue and is willing to develop stable and constructive relations with both Israel and Arab States. We support the idea that the only realistic way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through an agreement between the parties that ends all claims and fulfils the aspirations of both sides. A lasting solution to the conflict must be achieved, one which would see Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Accordingly, we urge the parties to renew their commitment to the two-State solution, to build trust and resume meaningful negotiations with the aim of achieving a comprehensive peace agreement. We also reiterate the call on all sides not to undertake steps that would lead further away from a negotiated solution. We consistently support the Middle East peace process and believe that peace in the region can be achieved only if viable mutual concessions are made at the negotiating table.

Ukraine also reiterates its position that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement lies within the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties in the conflict of the relevant Security Council resolutions and other documents — such as the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which remains of strategic importance for any future comprehensive peace agreement.

Regarding the situation in Syria, Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to the universal principles and basic norms of international law, in particular the strict observance of human rights, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and State sovereignty. We strongly condemn the ongoing violence and systematic violations of human rights in Syria perpetrated by both the regime and terrorist groups. Fighting between Government forces, non-State armed groups and listed terrorist groups continues to result in the death, injury and displacement of civilians, as well as the destruction of property and infrastructure. Parties to the conflict continue to disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law, including for the protection of civilians.

May 2015 was reportedly the deadliest month of the Syrian crisis so far. We express our deep concerns regarding the continued bloodshed and violence against civilians in Syria, particularly that caused by military operations of the Syrian regime in heavily populated areas of the country. That includes the use of barrel bombs, which is prohibited under international law. The indiscriminate and excessive use of force by the army against the civilian population, as well as the intolerable violence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and other terrorist groups operating on the ground, contribute to the considerable human sufferings in Syria.

In a letter of 18 June, Ukraine, along with 70 other countries, expressed its outrage at the never-ending state of unchecked brutality in Syria, especially the systematic use of barrel bombs. At the same time, Ukraine proceeds from the fact that, according to the Charter of the United Nations, the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security falls on the Security Council.

Ukraine remains deeply concerned about the activities of ISIS and other associated terrorist entities in the Middle East. The negative impact of their presence in the region, their violent, extremist ideology and their destabilizing actions must not be tolerated and should be duly addressed by the international community. We strongly condemn the crimes and acts of mass violence that ISIS commits against civilians — including the most vulnerable minorities, which may amount to crimes against humanity. We hail all possible steps, including appropriate military operations against ISIS forces, conducted by the international coalition, aimed at the complete removal of terrorist threats from the region. We underscore that the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups that commit barbaric acts against the people of Syria and Iraq should contribute to the political transformation of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing.

I would like to begin my statement by welcoming the conclusion of the final agreement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear issue last week, as well as its endorsement through the adoption of resolution 2231 (2015) this past Monday. In a region with increasingly complex and disastrous crises, we value this agreement as a timely testament to the possibilities of dialogue and diplomacy. Japan appreciates the efforts made by the parties and looks forward to its thorough implementation. As Iran further reintegrates into the global economy, we look to the country to play an increasing role in the stability of the region, one commensurate with its influence. We therefore hope that the agreement will serve to strengthen not only the international non-proliferation regime, but also the region's stability.

The unabated violence and the absence of political solutions are exacerbating the plight of millions on the ground. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, three of the four countries with the most severe and large-scale humanitarian crises — namely, Syria, Iraq and Yemen — are located in the Middle East. The international community

must not let the dire humanitarian situation become a breeding ground for extremist ideology. We therefore condemn the heinous acts of terror committed in Iraq and Turkey in the past two weeks. At the same time, we must also not lose sight of the fact that political solutions are the only durable solutions to the ongoing conflicts in the region.

Because of the time limitation, I will concentrate my remarks on the Middle East peace process and leave my comments on Syria and Yemen to my written text, which I believe has been distributed.

The instability of the region should not divert our attention from the Middle East peace process. One year ago, we were reminded of the damage that the absence of a political solution can impose on the ground. The stagnant reconstruction process and the worsening economic situation in Gaza are of great concern. Gaza is an integral part of Palestine; hence the worsening humanitarian situation there not only undermines its precarious social cohesion but also the viability of two States living side by side in peace and security. We therefore call on the international community to steadily disburse the pledges made at Cairo Conference on Reconstructing Gaza, held in October 2014, and strengthen its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which faces serious funding shortages. Furthermore, we call for the easing and eventual lifting of the Gaza blockade, while duly taking security concerns into account.

The worsening humanitarian situation on the ground highlights the need for the resumption of peace negotiations. An environment conducive to the resumption of talks must be recreated. In that regard, we welcome the easing of restrictions taken by the Israeli Government during Ramadan and urge that such measures be extended on a permanent basis. It is imperative that both parties refrain from unilateral measures that could undermine efforts to resume peace negotiations. To that effect, we reiterate our call to Israel to freeze settlement activities, which are illegal under international law. Correspondingly, we call on Palestine to exert efforts to advance and consolidate its national reconciliation process.

In the light of the current impasse, Japan believes that the international community, including the Security Council, could contribute to the resumption of negotiations as appropriate and when necessary. We therefore welcome the initiatives pursued by France to advance the process. Japan enjoys strong ties with both sides and is a principal contributor to Palestine's development, including through initiatives such as the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, which mobilize regional actors. Firm in our belief that we can contribute to a two-State solution, we stand ready to play a further constructive role in such international efforts.

We are confronting deep and complex crises in the region. While the urgent humanitarian needs must surely be addressed, we must also not lose sight of the underlying factors that are fuelling instability in the region. Prime Minister Abe, in his policy speech on the Middle East in January, highlighted the philosophy that the best way is to go in the middle, representing the ancestral wisdom of the region. It emphasizes the importance of embracing dialogue and moderation as well as of nurturing societies to become resistant to the allures of extremism. Although political solutions are long and arduous, those are what are most needed at the moment.

With that understanding, Japan has pledged and is delivering $2.5 billion in non-military assistance to the region. Please rest assured that Japan, in cooperation the United Nations and the international community, stands ready not only to address the humanitarian crises but also to support political solutions to the conflicts in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. AlJarallah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to address the Security Council today on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). At the outset, allow me to congratulate New Zealand on assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. We also thank Malaysia for guiding the Council's work during the past month. I would also like to thank the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing this morning.

With regard to the agreement reached by the P5+1 with the Islamic Republic of Iran on its nuclear programme, and the related resolution 2231 (2015), the OIC hopes that the agreement will serve as a pathway to security and stability in the Middle East. We hope that the international community will endeavour to

make the Middle East region one free of weapons of mass destruction. We also hope it will compel Israel to adhere the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject its nuclear arsenal to United Nations inspections.

With the rising tide of extremism, terrorism and violence in the Middle East, the question of Palestine remains the OIC's central concern. Despite the negotiation efforts exerted over the past 25 years, including the recent mediation efforts sponsored by the United States to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, all have failed to achieve an agreement. That is because Israel, the occupying Power, has failed to honour its commitments. International peace efforts have not succeeded in getting Israel to release Palestinianprisoners, halt settlement activities and to put an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the siege on East Jerusalem. As a result, the international community must redouble its efforts to stop Israel's illegal policies and practices and their impact on the two-State division.

We face today a difficult situation characterized by growing frustration given the ongoing illegal conduct of Israel, the occupying Power, its denial of the rights of the Palestinian people and its violations of international law and legally binding resolutions. We must emphasize that Israel's occupation policy to create a de facto reality is not legitimate. While it may serve to establish temporary security, it will never lead to sustainable peace and security.

The OIC underscores the ongoing responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until a just and comprehensive resolution to the conflict is found for all its aspects. In the meantime, we support the Palestinian decision to internationalize the Palestinian issue and to bring it before the international legal system. We support all efforts to adopt a new Security Council resolution to reiterate the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including that of self-determination, as well as establishing a time frame for ending the Israeli occupation from all Palestinian Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, and providing an international mechanism to guarantee the full implementation of the resolution.

The OIC would also like to emphasize the importance of the involvement of all international parties in all efforts to achieve peace. We call for the expansion of the Quartet and its mandate to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and to achieve the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with an independent the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. Given the importance of realizing the political and legal identity of the State of Palestine and its rightful place in the international community, we must further promote and mobilize more international recognition for a State of Palestine by supporting its accession to international institutions, organizations and covenants, including the International Criminal Court, in order to protect the rights of the Palestinian people.

Almost one year has passed since Israel's military aggression against the Gaza Strip. However, the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen at an alarming rate due to Israel's prolonged illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. There has been no progress in compelling Israel to implement resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for ensuring the sustained and regular flow of goods and people through the Gaza crossings. Therefore, the Organization of the Islamic Conference calls upon the Security Council to take the necessary measures towards the immediate lifting of the blockade imposed upon the entire Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, in order to end their suffering and ensure their protection. We also urge the international community to fulfil the financial pledges made at the Cairo Conference in order to advance reconstruction efforts and deter further deterioration.

We also express our concern over the critical financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) at an extremely important time in terms of assisting the Palestinian people. The international community must shoulder its responsibility to support UNRWA.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference renews its demand that Israel implement resolution 497 (1981), which calls for its withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders. It also renews its commitment to stand by the Lebanese Republic in support of all actions and measures taken to promote its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We demand that Israel halt its violations of Lebanese sovereignty, withdraw completely from the occupied Lebanese territories and implement resolution 1701 (2006).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I thank New Zealand for convening today's open debate, which draws the attention of the international community to the alarming situation in the Middle East, including in Palestine and its occupied territories. We thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. There are several concerns on which my delegation would like to focus.

First of all, my delegation is concerned about the Palestinian situation, and calls for urgent action to mitigate the suffering of the local population. The settlement process in the occupied territories aggravates the conflict. Kazakhstan recognizes the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to the creation of an independent State of Palestine peacefully co-existing with Israel within the 1967 borders, and to full-fledged membership in the United Nations. We see the two-State solution as the only viable option for a durable peace, and therefore call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate political responsibility and goodwill to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of their peoples.

We need to respond urgently and boldly to combat ongoing attempts to create quasi-State entities opposing and fighting legitimate Governments, in order to avert atrocities in local populations. Kazakhstan co-sponsored resolution 2178 (2014), on foreign terrorist fighters, as we are committed to combatting terrorism through a comprehensive approach that involves all Member States and regional organizations in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

All perpetrators should be brought to justice and all impunity ended, and every effort must be made to isolate, impede and incapacitate terrorists and their funding sources. Most of all, social media — a powerful weapon in the hands of terrorist groups to spread religious extremism and separatism and recruit volunteers — instead of being indiscriminately exploited, should be utilized to encourage the youth to become agents of peace and harmony.

Last month, Astana hosted the Central and South Asia Regional Conference on Countering Violent Extremism to develop new strategies, specific programmes and initiatives to be considered at a similar summit to be held on the margins of the general debate of the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. The Regional Conference was a follow-up to the summit on the issue held in Washington, D.C., in February.

We need to find inclusive political solutions through the Security Council, the good offices of the Secretary-General and dialogue that includes system-wide coherence in the United Nations, with civil society as the watchdogs. Likewise, attention should be given towards combating transnational crime and the illegal trafficking of weapons, arms and narcotics, trafficking of human beings and violence against civilian populations.

My country also expresses concern for the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, with the increasing flow of refugees and displaced persons. We call for the mobilization of emergency relief efforts, and we see peaceful means as the only way to resolve the conflict in the Middle East.

We believe that regional and international players must create conditions for solving the Syrian crisis, but a peaceful solution to the conflict can be found only by the Syrians themselves. They need to come to a peaceful solution. The aim of global players should be to create conditions for solving the Syrian crisis, without any external pressure or interference. That is the basis of our approach. We have no hidden agenda and our position is clearly neutral, with the sole interest of creating durable, long-term peace in Syria.

We are confident that all political peaceful means, including various regional dialogue platforms, should be used to achieve long-awaited peace and non-violence. The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, established at the initiative of Kazakhstan's President more than two decades ago and uniting 26 States from Asia and the Middle East, represents that kind of dialogue opportunity to bridge political gaps among nations of the region. Kazakhstan supports the efforts of the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations in promoting the ideals and values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for long-lasting security and stability.

Last month, Kazakhstan convened the fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions to promote peace based on spiritual values, with the Secretary-General in attendance. The final declaration of the Congress calls on world leaders to end the abyss of distrust and restore peace and harmony.

My country is willing to share its experience in maintaining harmony among more than 100 different

ethnic groups and almost 20 religious confessions in its territory, including the work of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, which was created 20 years ago to promote peace and stability in the country through maintaining inter-ethnic and interreligious accord.

As seen in our efforts with the Alliance and the Congress, Kazakhstan is known to be a bridge-builder, bringing about durable rapprochement among various groups and helping to further peace processes. A key example I can cite is that Kazakhstan hosted, in Almaty, two rounds of talks between Iran and the international mediators during the interim phase, in 2013, which helped to carry forward the draft Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding Iran's nuclear programme. We therefore welcome the recently concluded agreement and Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Kazakhstan has made a further contribution for peace and stability through non-proliferation. I am pleased to say that my country has reached an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on hosting the IAEA Low Enriched Uranium Bank on its territory, as a guarantee mechanism to meet the fuel supply needs of States members of the Agency.

Kazakhstan will stand in solidarity with the international community to ensure peace in the Middle East based on freedom and justice for all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): I thank the New Zealand presidency for convening this important debate, and the Special Coordinator for his insightful briefing.

Iceland reiterates its strong conviction that the only path to peace between Israel and Palestine is the two-State solution.

But both sides need to commit fully to the two-State solution, and they must refrain from actions that undermine the viability of the only solution that will bring peace. Israeli leaders have yet to dispel, by actions on the ground, the very serious doubt cast on their commitment to the two-State solution during the pre-election period. Indeed, acts on the ground continue to be very damaging to the chances of peace; there is little letup in the expansion of Israeli settlements and the expropriation of land in Palestine, a clear breach of international law. We join others in calling on Israel to immediately stop all settlement activities.

Of continuing deep concern is the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, where we continue to call for the lifting of the blockade. The cycle of violence has to be broken, which calls for different approaches by all concerned. In this regard, we welcome the report by the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict.

The situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is also of deep concern. The continued fragmentation of Palestine through settlement activities and movement and access restrictions undermine Palestinian livelihoods and deprive the Palestinians of their basic human rights. Israel needs to abide by international humanitarian and human rights law, including ceasing the demolition of Palestinian homes and the displacement of Palestinians from their land.

Predictably, the highly abnormal living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories have a disproportionate impact on women and children. We commend the work of the United Nations agencies against gender-based violence. The Mehwar Centre for Protection and Empowerment of Women and Families, supported by UN-Women and to which Iceland has contributed, does excellent and much-needed work in the West Bank. Ensuring equal participation of women at all decision-making levels on both sides of the conflict and within the international community is also key to durable peace and reconciliation. Unfortunately, the absence of women in the peace process has been noticeable. This has to change.

Terrorist activity from Palestinian elements is also totally unacceptable and can only undermine peace. We condemn all acts of violence against civilians. The safety and well-being of civilians must always be ensured.

The recent report by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations underlines the primacy of politics in maintaining and achieving peace. Managing a crisis is not enough; the aim must be to solve it. There is consensus on the urgency thereof. There are signs in both communities of a loss of faith in the possibility of a peaceful solution. It is therefore essential that the Security Council create a clear frame for ending the occupation and establishing a durable peace, with two States living side by side in peace and security. The dangers of inaction are far greater for all parties involved than the risks of action.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Emvula (Namibia): I wish to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of July. I also wish to thank you for having organized this debate at this crucial moment, which affords the wider United Nations membership an opportunity to address the challenges facing the Middle East, particularly the people of Palestine. This debate is taking place one year after Israel's devastating attacks on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in the worst escalation of hostilities and loss of life in Gaza since 1967, requiring urgent international action.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As we commemorate the barbaric massacre of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians, the injury to more than 11,000 and the destruction of homes in the Gaza Strip during the summer of 2014, my delegation joins others in condemning the violations, the continuous provocations and the escalation of the aggressive measures that continue to be carried out by the Israeli occupying forces, aimed at collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

My delegation wishes to reiterate its concern at the continuing turmoil in and deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, due to the illegal provocation policies being carried out by the Israeli regime against the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupying forces continue to carry out airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, injuring more and more Palestinians and causing great fear and distress among the population, which continues to suffer from deplorable living conditions as a result of the unlawful blockade.

Israel is continuing to perpetrate grave violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, threatening to further destabilize the already fragile situation and seriously undermine the future of the peace process, which it suspended by its unilateral decision to halt negotiations. Therefore, the international community, including the Security Council, cannot continue to fail to hold Israel accountable for its flagrant breaches of the international law. Such continued failure by the international community has only further emboldened the occupying Power and bolstered its impunity, which has resulted in the continuation of the aforementioned Israeli violations and the failure to secure a just and lasting peace.

As recognized unanimously by the international community, this unjust situation and the consequent loss of hope is unsustainable and highly volatile, requiring urgent remedy to prevent further deterioration and the explosion of another cycle of violence.

While condemning the indiscriminate rocket fire emanating from Gaza targeted at Israeli cities and civilian infrastructure, we contend that such attacks do not justify the disproportionate use of force and the collective punishment of the 1.7 million Palestinians living in Gaza, including the killing of children and attacks on civilian facilities, including schools.

Israel's actions are in clear violation of its obligations, as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to protect the civilian population under its occupation. Israel, the occupying Power, cannot be allowed to remain immune from the provisions of international humanitarian and human rights law governing such situations. If Israel continues to reject the demands for respect for international law, then measures aimed at ensuring an end to the violations and that the rule of law prevails must be undertaken in response.

While supporting the steadfastness and resolve of the Palestinian leadership in the face of this unprovoked aggression against their land and people, we reiterate our condemnation of all of the illegal actions and crimes being perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which are dramatically raising tensions and destabilizing the situation on the ground.

We call once again on the international community, specifically the Security Council, to assume its responsibility as accorded by the United Nations Charter, to act collectively to address this crisis so as to prevent its exacerbation and to put an end to all human rights violations against the Palestinians.

We reiterate our call for the unconditional removal of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has caused and continues to cause so much suffering for the Palestinian people. The blockade is inhumane and violates international law.

We reiterate our strong support for the resumption of the peace process, and appeal to Israelis and the Palestinians to commit themselves to it. Both parties should abide by their previous agreements and obligations in order to achieve a lasting peace and live side by side within secure borders. At the same time, I wish to reaffirm Namibia's support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, its unconditional admission as a full Member of the United Nations and its agencies, and its taking of its rightful place among the community of nations.

I would conclude by reiterating Namibia's unwavering support for, and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just cause for obtaining freedom, independence and social justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): My delegation wishes to thank New Zealand, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for convening this quarterly open debate in connection with the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to extend our appreciation to the Special Coordinator for his briefing and his dedicated efforts aimed at finding a solution to the conflicts in the Middle East.

Peace will never be achieved through violence and bloodshed. This July marks one year since the most recent round of escalated conflict between Palestine and Israel and the launch of the Israeli military operation in Gaza, which was the worst escalation of hostilities since 1967. Gaza remains a city in ruins. With the conflict is unresolved, along the breakdown of talks since 2014, lasting peace remains a distant dream.

While hope is dim, we reiterate our call for a two-State solution, which remains the one and only viable solution to enduring peace in the region. The Maldives therefore reiterates its call for the full realization of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, the right of Palestinian people to establish their own State, alongside Israel, on the basis of a two-State solution, within pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also call on the Security Council to reinvigorate its efforts to find new ways of moving forward.

The human cost of the conflict in Syria weighs heavily upon all of us and compels us to explore all our options in finding solutions. A political solution must be found to end the bloodshed in line with the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We would like to underscore the importance of achieving an inclusive political solution in Syria based on the Geneva talks. Accordingly, we call on the United Nations membership to actively contribute ideas to the body in the hope of finding the way to peace.

The Maldives remains deeply concerned over the impact of the situation in Yemen on the stability of the entire region. Similarly, we must ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches the more than 80 per cent of the population of Yemen that is now in need of aid. Peace must win in Yemen.

The Maldives condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and believes that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, race, culture or society. Islam promotes peace and the protection and preservation of life and unity. Islam also condemns violence, and the Maldives does not condone the use of the veil of religion as a pretext for inflicting terror. Religion is not a means to a political end.

While there are numerous violent hot spots in the region, we are heartened to see progress as well. In that regard, the Maldives welcomes the historic framework agreement reached in Lausanne on 2 April between Iran and the P5+1, which represents an opportunity to resolve more than the nuclear issue alone. That is a clear example of how political will and unrelenting effort can help bring solutions.

We need leadership. We need political will. But above all, we need courage — courage from the leaders of the region, courage from the leaders of members of the Security Council and from the members of the international community. We need the courage to do the right thing, to take the right step forward, towards lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): The situation across the Middle East continues to be a grave concern for all of us. Terrorism, violence and humanitarian crises have escalated and engulfed millions of innocent people in the region. The peace, security and stability of the entire region and beyond are at stake.

In the face of this grim reality, we must maintain our focus on the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, which still undermines the prospects for lasting regional and global peace. Failing to do so will further destabilize the region and lead to more extremism.

One year after the unprecedented suffering caused by the Israel Defense Forces offensive, little to no recovery or reconstruction has taken place in Gaza. The military operation, coupled with the illegal blockade imposed on Gaza, has led to chronic, widespread and systematic violations of human rights, above all the right to life and security, as underlined by the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Gaza. People who live in tremendous despair and insecurity are losing their belief that a solution and peaceful coexistence are possible. The current situation is unsustainable and will only further disenfranchise the Palestinian people. The international community can no longer afford to stand idly by as this tragedy unfolds.

While the immediate priority must be to address the grave situation and growing frustration in Gaza, only long-term solutions can turn the tide in Gaza's reconstruction. The ongoing illegal blockade and other restrictions must be lifted in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009). Further steps should be taken to alleviate the dire situation, sustain the current ceasefire and support the efforts of the national unity Government to operate in Gaza. On this occasion, we also would like to highlight the alarming financial challenge that United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is facing today and the importance of providing sustained support to the Agency as a contributor to stability in the region.

The need to find a negotiated political settlement for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, achieving a two-State solution and ending the longest occupation in modern history in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, remain urgent priorities. There is a broad international consensus on the unsustainability and unacceptability of the status quo. The trend in Europe towards the recognition of the State of Palestine is a reflection of this frustration. It is our sincere hope that reason will prevail and that Israel will engage with the peace process in a sincere and results-oriented manner. Israel should demonstrate its commitment to a two-State solution, as it is the only viable option for sustainable peace and security.

Palestinian unity is also imperative if a lasting solution is to be reached. It is high time for the international community to renew its engagement to finding a solution of the problem. We need to intensify our efforts towards the adoption of a Security Council resolution setting a time frame and parameters for peace negotiations based on the vision of a two-State solution for peace. The Council should assume its primary responsibility vis-à-vis international peace and security. Turkey will continue its support for finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict and the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Syrian crisis has become a constant factor of instability and immense human suffering for the entire region and beyond. A collective response that addresses the magnitude of the threat remains lacking. One should keep in mind that no country is immune to this acute crisis as its impacts range from terrorism to displacement and devastation. The regime is responsible for this chaos.

Turkey, the largest refugee-hosting country in the world, is gravely concerned by the humanitarian and security impacts of the crisis, which have caused unprecedented devastation. Given the enormity of that challenge, I need to reiterate that a meaningful and genuine burden-sharing is the collective responsibility of the international community. It is neither possible nor just to expect Turkey to face, alone, the migratory pressures or the risks and threats emanating from Syria, as we recently witnessed during the clashes in Ayn al-Arab/Kobani and Tel Abyad.

The international community has still not envisaged a comprehensive strategy, with political, security and humanitarian pillars, to re-establish stability in Syria. We must focus on addressing the underlying causes of the problem through resolute action. The regime's indiscriminate attacks should not be overshadowed by the appalling actions of Daesh. It is also important to express outrage at the use of barrel bombs and the increase in chlorine attacks by the regime forces, as was emphasized in the recent letter of 18 June, signed by 71 countries, which was addressed to the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly.

We believe that there is no military solution to the conflict. The territorial integrity of Syria is of utmost importance. Peace and stability can only be reinstated in Syria through a genuine and comprehensive political transition, based on the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex) through the establishment

of a "transitional governing body" with authority to exercise full executive powers. In that framework, we support the mission of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, and his bilateral consultations initiative.

We would also like to highlight our support to the Iraqi Government in its fight against Daesh, and express our concern at the rise of sectarian-motivated attacks against civilians. In that regard, the implementation of inclusive policies to end the alienation of some segments of society and the enhancement of efforts to achieve national reconciliation would be key for Iraq's stability.

Last but not least, let me express our support for the efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Yemen, which can only occur only through peaceful dialogue and reconciliation. The parameters for achieving that goal are clear: the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, the final Outcomes Document of the National Dialogue Conference, and Security Council resolution 2216 (2015). Yemen should not become another showcase of the damage inflicted by sectarian policies in the region. With that understanding, upon our proposal an Organization of Islamic Cooperation Contact Group on Yemen was established. Its goal is to contribute to finding a political solution. We are also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Yemen. To that end, we will do our utmost to continue our assistance to the population in need.

The supremacy of diplomacy was demonstrated again by some recent developments, and gave us hope that a solution to the protracted crises can be found. In that regard, we welcome the agreement reached recently between the P5+1 and Iran on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as well as the adoption of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) on the topic. The initialling of the Libyan Political Agreement is also a promising first step towards a comprehensive solution, with the participation of all parties to the political dialogue and establishment of a Government of National Accord.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong commitment to the peace and security of the overall region and our full and continued solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. AlShamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Arab Group, I commend New Zealand for its assumption of the presidency of the Council in the month of July. We thank His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully for chairing this open debate, and we wish New Zealand great success in presiding over the work of the Council this month. I also thank and commend New Zealand's predecessor, the delegation of Malaysia for its successful management of the Council's work last month. We also thank the Secretary-General for his efforts, as well as Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and for his tireless efforts to attain peace in the Middle East region.

My statement will be brief. A full copy will be available on our Mission's website. The United Arab Emirates also supports the statement delivered by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The briefing this morning has reflected the worsening humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people resulting from the measures adopted by Israel, which violate international laws and norms and constitute the direct cause for the continued stalemate in the long anticipated peace talks.

Despite all the international and regional efforts and initiatives made during the past two decades, including the efforts of the Quartet and the United States of America, we continue to witness many lost opportunities for attaining peace. That not only prolongs the suffering of the Palestinian people and increases their economic losses, but also deepens their frustration, despair and instability. It has also led to the emergence of dangerous extremism, which is now threatening our region and the entire world.

The Arab peoples are bearing the onerous burden of confronting those serious challenges. The Arab Group strongly condemns the continued illegal policies and systematic violations committed by Israel, which include the expansion of its illegitimate settlements deep inside the Palestinian territories and within Al-Quds and the adoption of measures against Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Holy City. That includes the confiscation of properties, the demolition of homes and buildings, the displacement of people, including the arbitrary transfer of 7,000 Palestinian Bedouins and shepherds from 64 residential areas in the West Bank, and the illegal planning and division of the Palestinian territories. Those measures have made it practically

impossible for the Palestinians to exploit their lands or build in Area C in the West Bank. All those measures violate international law and ignore the wishes of the majority of the international community.

We welcome the recent report of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry into possible human rights violations and war crimes in Gaza (A/HCR/29/52), which reflected the unprecedented levels of suffering and hardship experienced by the unarmed Palestinian people, and we call for the implementation of an accountability system that would bring those responsible for war crimes to justice.

We also urge the donor countries to fulfil their commitments announced last year at the Cairo Conference on Palestine: Reconstructing Gaza in order to ensure the necessary financing for reconstruction in Gaza. We stress the shared responsibility of the international community towards lifting the Israeli siege imposed on Gaza and providing the necessary support for United Nations programmes, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which we strongly support.

We also reaffirm before the Council our full and continuing support to the Palestinian Unity Government. We urge the international community to increase its support for this Government in order to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities and take a leading role in restoring its control over Gaza, including its border crossings, and also to support its efforts towards achieving national reconciliation.

The Arab Group believes that the continuation of the historic injustice done to the Palestinian people by Israel is one of the main causes for the current deterioration in peace and stability in the region and for inflaming tensions, with terrible consequences throughout the region and the entire world. Therefore, the failed negotiation process should not become a vicious circle, reaching a dead end without the adoption of effective international efforts to eliminate the causes of that failure, for which Israel is fully responsible. Therefore, we ask, now more than ever, that the Council's efforts not be limited to holding these routine periodic briefings, despite their importance, but that the Council also play a leading role by taking the necessary steps towards the immediate cessation of all violations committed by Israel, according to the principles and terms of the peace process, in order to create an appropriate environment for resuming peace negotiations.

We hope that the international Powers will support the efforts of the Arab Ministerial Committee tasked with ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories so as to ensure the launch of serious negotiations. That would make a difference. We also hope that the Council will respond to the repeated calls and initiatives made by the Arab Group since last year for the adoption of an effective resolution that would salvage the peace process and determine the basic terms of reference and principles of negotiations based on the two-State solution. Such a resolution should be fully implemented in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. It should be a resolution that can ensure the possibility of reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement within a specific time frame and of ending every aspect of Israel's occupation, including its full military withdrawal from all the territories that have been occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. We also hope that such a resolution will enable the establishment of an independent, sovereign, viable and internationally recognized Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in permanent peace and security. In that context, we would like to express our support for the efforts of some of the members of the Security Council, particularly France.

We regret that the Syrian crisis is now in its fifth year, and we reiterate our support for all efforts to reach a political solution to it, particularly those of Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, aimed at achieving positive results that can help to realize the Syrian people's aspirations for a democratic political transition and the restoration of stability and security in the country. Until that goal is achieved, we urge the international community to increase its assistance to those Syrians who have been affected and displaced or who have fled the conflict, and to share the burden of sheltering Syrian refugees with the country's neighbours, especially Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

In conclusion, we hope our debate today will contribute to advancing international efforts aimed at resolving the Palestinian question and ending the Syrian crisis so as to bring peace and stability to the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending His Excellency Mr. Murray McCully, Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, for convening this important debate. I also wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing to the Council this morning.

We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For more than 50 years, the international community has struggled to find a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. We are encouraged by the international community's continuing diplomatic engagement with the issue, including the recent United Nations international meeting held in Moscow in July in support of peace between Israel and Palestine. The people of Palestine have suffered as a result of a range of factors, in particular by being dispossessed of much of their land. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze of settlement activity. The ongoing settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, must end as soon as possible if sustainable peace is to be achieved in the region. In recent years, the continued blockade of Gaza has added to the pain and frustrations of Palestinians living there. We encourage the parties to exercise restraint for the sake of the larger goal of peace.

Another key challenge the Palestinian people are now facing is reconstruction, following the destruction wrought in Gaza last year. It is our fervent hope that, with the help of the global community, the people of Palestine will rise to the challenge of rebuilding their lives and livelihoods. It is urgent that their living conditions improve. In that regard, we also strongly support the work of the various United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

We join with the international community in appealing to all parties to refrain from indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians, which are detrimental to the peace and security of both Israel and Palestine and the stability of the entire region. Indiscriminate attacks on civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law, can only intensify feelings of desperation and insecurity and widen the gap between the parties. At the same time, the security needs of the Israeli people must also be respected. A climate conducive to peace will be encouraged by a common humanitarian approach in which both sides are sensitive to the other's concerns.

The Middle East conflict attracts a considerable amount of international attention and resources. The lingering question of Palestine is one of the main issues driving the recruitment of terrorists in the region and worldwide. Terrorism, including the recent phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters with origins in the region, has the potential for posing a serious threat to the security and stability of every nation, tearing apart the established fabric of nation States and the international legal order. In today's interconnected world, it is very easy for agents of extremism to spread their ideologies across national borders.

Sri Lanka supports Palestine's application for admission to full membership of the United Nations. We recognize that the viability of a two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people. We reiterate our support for the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 242 (1967), of 22 November 1967, regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution, established on the basis of the 1967 borders. We must not give up on our hopes for a lasting peace accord that can lead to the establishment of a fully sovereign and secure State of Palestine. We hope that the parties concerned will not fritter away the opportunity that the current international climate presents for achieving a sustainable peace when there is so much international good will supporting the process.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Seck (*spoke in French*): On behalf of all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a body that my country, Senegal, has had the privilege of chairing since its inception, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on New Zealand's outstanding conduct of its presidency of the Security Council this month — sincere and well-deserved congratulations, since your presidency has been packed with significant events and results, including, I am pleased to say, the Council's adoption on Monday of resolution 2231 (2015), endorsing the P5+1's agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear

capacity, as well as the important open debate, wisely planned for 30 July and marking the end of your presidency, on the major security challenges faced by small island developing States. I hope those positive developments will be reflected in the situation in the Middle East in general and in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is inarguably that situation's Gordian knot.

We cannot repeat it too often: the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been, and still remains, the chief source of the instability and insecurity afflicting the Middle East and far beyond. Many of the extremist and violent groups currently proliferating in the region use the fact of the injustice done to the Palestinian people as a pretext in their attempts to legitimize their harmful activities. It has been 47 years since the occupation of the Palestinian territories began, 40 since the General Assembly established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and 20 since the Oslo process stalled. It is high time that the Security Council, the supreme organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, found a way to impose a final settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict through a solution based on two States, the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, living side by side along the 1967 borders.

It is up to the Security Council to end this anachronism, which, in addition to being an injustice and an impediment to the respect or international law, is contrary to the ideals and aims of the United Nations, whose seventieth anniversary the international community is preparing to celebrate in a few weeks, when it will adopt a sustainable and inclusive development programme that leaves no nation or individual behind.

The long cycle of direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis is now at an impasse, punctuated by violence, the rampant grabbing of Palestinian land, the continued imposition of settlements and the blockade imposed on Gaza — all of which culminated last summer in the deadliest war that Gaza has ever known..The diplomatic efforts to establish a vital timeline for ending the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories did not come to fruition last December in the Council. Should the Council not, therefore, take inspiration from the multilateral process leading to the adoption, last Monday, of resolution 2231 (2015) on the Iranian nuclear issue? Should it not take inspiration from that process and launch a vigorous diplomatic initiative for the definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-state solution — with the State of Israel and the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within the pre-1967 borders?

Such a collective process could involve the action of an expanded Quartet, with the participation of regional Powers, supported by the Arab Peace Initiative, and an international conference, which was proposed in the past by the Russian Federation. It could also involve the approach that France proposed in the Security Council, an approach that seeks a comprehensive settlement of the conflict within a reasonable time frame.

For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People continues to discharge its mandate conscientiously, pleading, when necessary, for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, as well as for the appropriateness of a Palestinian State, in the spirit, if not the letter, of the founding resolution 181 (1967). In so doing, the Committee works together with all individuals or entities — whether Palestinian or Israeli — and all others that might be able to make some type of contribution to the advent of a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict.

This year, for example, the Committee organized an international meeting on the humanitarian situation in Gaza from 31 March to 1 April in Vienna, an international consultation on legal aspects of the question of Palestine in The Hague from 20 to 22 May, and an international meeting more recently in Moscow from 1 to 2 July to support the Israeli-Palestinian peace process entitled, "The two-State solution: a key prerequisite for achieving peace and stability in Middle East". Among its future activities, the Committee will, in cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, conduct a similar activity in Brussels at the beginning of September 2015 on the topic entitled "Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, obstacles to peace. What solutions for tomorrow?"

For all practical purposes, I would remind you that all of the Committee's activities and its reports and recommendations are available and can be consulted on the Committee's website.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Ntonga (Zimbabwe): May I begin by conveying my delegation's appreciation to New Zealand for having

convened this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his insightful contributions.

Zimbabwe aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-aligned Movement.

For the overwhelming majority of the international community, a two State-solution based on the pre-June 1967 borders is the only sustainable way of ending the longest occupation in modern history. The parameters for the resolution of the Palestinian question are known; they are enshrined in numerous United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Oslo Accords, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet's Road Map for Peace. Despite those known parameters, violence against the Palestinian people continues in the occupied territories. According to the June 2015 report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/49/52), the scale of devastation in Gaza in 2014 was unprecedented, with sufficient evidence pointing to serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, which, in some cases, amount to war crimes.

The Secretary- General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), released on 5 June 2015, indicates that 540 Palestinian children were killed and 2,955 were injured. The report concludes that:

> "The unprecedented and unacceptable scale of the impact on children raises grave concern about Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law, notably the principles of distinction, proportionality and in relation to the excessive use of force".

Despite those findings, Israel has not been held accountable.

Israel continues to approve the construction of illegal settlements despite unanimous condemnation of settlement activities by the international community. That is all in an effort to change the demographic character of the occupied territory. Settlement activity is illegal under international law and prejudicial to a just peace. The illegal blockade continues, and the wall of shame remains in place — as do the various forms of persecution perpetrated against the Palestinian people, including the demolition of homes, illegal arrests under what is known as administrative detentions, and the forced displacement of Palestinians. Despite all those violations, the Security Council has not held Israel to account. The latest demonstration of the Security Council's paralysis was the failure to adopt a resolution on 30 December 2014 that would have set a timetable for Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory. The resolution, which provided a reasonable time frame for withdrawal, would have given the Palestinian people a ray of hope.

We welcome current efforts in the Security Council by some members to negotiate a resolution that would pave the way for the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian settlements within a given time frame. Endless open-ended negotiations without clear objectives have not served the interests of the Palestinian people. As a measure of goodwill, we call on the Security Council to prevail on Israel to halt settlement activities, remit revenues, whenever they are due, to the Palestinian Authority and to lift the blockade on Gaza.

We listened attentively to the statements delivered by Council members this morning. All seem to be of the same mind — that the only sustainable way to end the conflict is a two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel coexisting in peace. Let us walk the talk. We hope that recent breakthroughs in multilateral diplomacy will inspire and provide lessons that will contribute to the resolution of this long-standing conflict in the Middle East, and to other conflicts in that region as well. We also call on the international community to honour all pledges made towards the reconstruction of Gaza. Indeed, some Council members this morning gave us an indication of the magnitude of the gap between the pledges and their delivery. It is huge.

May I conclude by reaffirming Zimbabwe's continued support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people. We look forward to Palestine's admission to its deserved status as a full Member of the United Nations, sovereign and equal with all other States.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba supports the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the Middle East region continues to be of serious concern to the international community. As we commemorate the one-year anniversary of the most recent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip — in

which more than 2,000 Palestinians lost their lives, including at least 299 women and 556 children, and which plunged the territory into terror, death and mass destruction — the Palestinian people continue to be victims of acts of vandalism perpetrated by Israel, which is occupying their lands, killing their children, destroying their heritage and curtailing their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination.

Despite periodic open debates in the Security Council on this issue, which have shown overwhelming support for the Palestinian cause, the Council, unfortunately, has not adopted any resolution demanding that Israel immediately end its military occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and end the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall on occupied Palestinian territory, and demanding accountability for war crimes and collective punishment committed by Israel against the Palestinian people.

The undemocratic veto right in the Security Council, which has allowed impunity in the conduct of Israel, must come to an end. This body must fulfil its obligation to promote a negotiated solution that guarantees the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, the peaceful coexistence of two independent States, starting with the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, and a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, pursuant to resolution 194(III) of the General Assembly. We are convinced that a solution to that long-standing conflict would help to reduce the tensions in the Middle East region today.

My delegation again reiterates in this forum its strong condemnation of the Israeli colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all measures, policies and practices associated with that campaign, which also include construction and expansion of the illegal settlements and the wall, the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families and the transfer of settlers into the occupied Palestinian territory, among other violations of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

Cuba also condemns, and calls for a definitive end to, violence, provocations and incitements to hatred and terror by Israeli settlers, arbitrary arrests, mass imprisonment and genocide against the Palestinian people. Cuba reaffirms its unequivocal solidarity with that people and the firm and decisive support for all actions to promote recognition of the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and the right of the State of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations. Many of the promises made for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following the atrocious bombing and massive destruction inflicted by Israel in July and August 2014 have not materialized. We call on all members of the international community to honour their commitments and to work for the reconstruction of that devastated area.

Peace in Syria is possible only through respect for the right of its people to decide their own destiny. A political solution through dialogue and negotiations is the only alternative to the conflict in Syria. Those who feed the conflict from the outside with the declared objective of regime change are responsible for thousands of civilian casualties accumulated during four years of fighting. We reiterate concern about the causes for the loss of innocent lives as a result of the Syrian conflict and again condemn all acts of violence that take place in that country against the civilian population, but the supposed protection of human life and the fight against extremist elements cannot serve as a pretext for foreign intervention.

The United Nations, especially this Council, should promote an immediate ceasefire to open the way for dialogue and negotiations and should not promote initiatives that encourage further tensions in the country. It should support all efforts in that direction, such as those that have driven the Russian Federation and other international actors to oppose those who seek to fan the conflict by dispatching arms and mercenaries.

The huge human, financial and material resources currently consumed by wars in the region would be better utilized to ensure health-care services and quality education, to encourage construction of infrastructure that generates progress, to protect and promote all human rights, including the right to development, to eradicate poverty and promote social justice. Those should be our priorities as Members of an Organization that was founded nearly 70 years ago to maintain international peace and security and to defend human dignity.

The role of the Security Council is crucial to achieving the aspirations of welfare, peace and development that all peoples in the Middle East deserve.

Its member States should be advocates of peaceful solutions, without foreign interference, that preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and contribute decisively to safeguarding the lives of the peoples affected by the conflicts in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): At the outset, allow me to congratulate New Zealand on its presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would like to express appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully, for organizing this debate on the situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also wish to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing and to congratulate him on his assumption of that important responsibility.

Bangladesh welcomes the agreement reached by the G5+1 with the Islamic Republic of Iran on its nuclear programme. We hope that the agreement will be a pathway to security, peace and stability in the Middle East by way of the international community giving the same attention to freeing the region of weapons of mass destruction.

The Palestinian issue is now the number-one longstanding issue in the field of international peace and security and deserves top priority for resolution. We should ask questions: can the people of Palestine live with this uncertainty of life and livelihood forever?

We regret that the appalling human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the repeated appeals of the international community to improve the deteriorating conditions of the Palestinian people remain unheeded. The people in the occupied territories continue to suffer due to Israel's blockades, closures, confiscation of land and demolition of houses. The illegal separation wall continues to divide and isolate communities, destroying livelihoods and preventing access to jobs, families, markets, schools and hospitals. Let us demand that those walls be torn down, including the walls in the mindset of the neighbours.

Gaza's borders have been subject to a regime of closure that is without precedent anywhere. Such closure is tantamount to strangulation of an entire population in the form of collective punishment. The quality of life of the Palestinians had already diminished to a subsistence level. The periodic escalation of violence only leads to further despair and destitution. Israel is doing that purposefully, to generate fear, fury and distress among the Palestinians. We deplore the Israeli policy of collective punishment, of forcing Palestinian people off of their land, of detaining people for a long time without charge, of restricting freedom of movement and property ownership by the Palestinian people, of deporting Palestinian inhabitants and depriving people of their legitimate claims over natural resources, including scarce water resources.

The Government of Israel has continued its settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, with a particularly aggressive settlement expansion in East Jerusalem. Those measures have been soundly rejected by the international community and their illegality unanimously confirmed, but they continue unabated. All settlement construction, including the so-called natural growth, is illegal under international law and must be halted immediately. Settlement activities constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and are war crimes under article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We appreciate the decision made by the Palestine Authority to become a member of the International Criminal Court, in order to seek justice for the people of Palestine.

Having monitored the situation closely, we would like to register our concern about the grave financial crisis besetting the Government of the State of Palestine, which undermines the accomplishments of its national institution-building programme. The crisis has been exacerbated by the decision of the Government of Israel to withhold the tax receipts it collects from Palestinians on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, as mutually agreed through the Oslo Accords.

We urge Israel to fulfil its legal obligation, as the occupying Power, to ensure that all inhabitants are safeguarded against all acts of violence and threats; to cease the illegal detention of Palestinian people, including children; to stop the destruction of homes and land confiscation; to allow the Palestinian people access to their lands, employment and natural resources; to desist from transferring its population to the territories it has occupied; and to lift its embargo against the Palestinians and immediately open all border crossings to allow free movement of goods, persons and humanitarian aid.

It is needless to mention that the people of Israel, who have suffered for years, know better. They know that neither force nor extermination, nor illegal occupation or subjugation or deprivation, can win and bring peace and stability in the long run. For sustainable peace and stability there is a two-State solution — the State of Palestine and the State of Israel living side by side in peace and harmony.

We express our total solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterate our full and unwavering support for the legitimate and inalienable right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent State, and we support its full membership in the United Nations and demand an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. We look forward to a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and the just resolution of all final status issues without delay.

The President: The representative of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Safaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): I asked for the floor in exercise of the right of reply, but allow me first to express my Permanent Mission's gratitude to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand and the New Zealand presidency of the Council and those ambassadors of Member States who have spoken in this meeting of the Council in favour of the deal concluded between Iran and the E3/EU+3, and for their positive and encouraging approach adopted with regard to this important event.

Once more, the representative of the Israeli regime raised some baseless allegations against my country, which I categorically and systematically reject.

The Israeli regime would have liked very much to see the controversy over Iran's nuclear energy programme continue forever. That regime looked at the controversy and the effective threat, which it touted as a golden opportunity and smokescreen to hide its criminal policy against the Palestinian people. It also loved to keep the international community busy with the issue in such a way that major countries have failed to address the prolonged occupation of the Palestinian territory, the criminal blockade of Gaza and the type of atrocities that it committed in Gaza last summer and which it continues to commit.

Therefore we will not be surprised to see, from now on, the Israeli regime increase its baseless accusations against us and against those who concluded the nuclear deal. With this deal at hand, it will be much more difficult for them to cheat and deceive people and Governments as to what the international community expects to be done in the Middle East. That regime will find it much more difficult to turn a deaf ear on the demands of the international community to end the occupation. It will also be much more difficult for them to stand as the only obstacle against the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. We and many others in the region and beyond believe that the nuclear warheads stockpiled by the Israeli regime constitute a grave threat to peace and security in our volatile region and that the Security Council should live up to its primary responsibility under the United Nations Charter and take the actions necessary to neutralize that threat.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): Looking at the empty seats here in the Security Council Chamber, I cannot refrain from asking: where are all of those representatives who made such strong and emotional appeals today and called on the Security Council to act? Why is it that the representatives of Kuwait, Indonesia, Namibia, Senegal and Iceland could not sit here and follow this debate until it ends? With such heartbreaking statements, I think that they should have stayed with us during our important discussion.

In her remarks earlier, the Lebanese representative quoted from different United Nations reports. I think that I would have expected the Lebanese representative to first read the recent reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Perhaps Lebanon should consider toning down its rhetoric and turning up the heat on Hizbullah's terrorist activities. Hizbullah has built an arsenal of 120,000 rockets with the kind help of Iran, whose representative just made another statement here. Those rockets are located inside populated areas in southern Lebanon as well as throughout Lebanese territory. In operating within the population and directing attacks against the civilian population of my country, Hizbullah is committing a double war crime.

But I must say that I was once again touched to hear the representative of Lebanon show such an interest in Palestinian rights, though I would suggest that instead of speaking empty words here, her Government should take a look at the Palestinian refugee camps

throughout Lebanon, where Palestinians are kept in some of the worst conditions in the region. They are subjected to violence, discrimination, oppression and marginalization from every sector of society.

I also found it interesting, again, as a response to the Iranian statement, that the Iranian representative was speaking about the Israeli occupation earlier, although Iran is the main occupier in the Middle East today, including in Syria and Lebanon. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is a terrorist entity responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of civilians in the Middle East and for terror attacks around the world. In Lebanon, Iran is the chief sponsor and supplier of illicit advanced weapons to Hizbullah, in blatant violation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Iran is in violation of those resolutions. Iran and its proxies, be it the Al-Assad regime, Hizbullah, Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, are a threat to international peace and security.

Only in the parallel universe of a Middle East open debate can a role model such as Saudi Arabia attack Israel while acting with full impunity and killing tens of thousands of civilians in Yemen while creating a humanitarian catastrophe in that country. It is very easy for Saudi Arabia to focus on the situation in my country and echo empty concerns for human rights while hiding the fact that, for example, today Saudi Arabia carried out its first barbaric execution after a pause for Ramadan by beheading one of its citizens. This latest beheading brings us to 103 executions in Saudi Arabia this year alone, a sharp increase over the 87 recorded executions during the whole of 2014.

With regard to the lengthy conspiracy theories that we heard earlier from the representative of Venezuela, I understand that the same culture of conspiracy is also used for the daily and systematic persecution of political activists and opposition members in Venezuela. Malaysia does not hesitate to support the Hamas terrorist organization here in the Council Chamber. It should also be emphasized that Malaysia's support for Hamas is also carried out on the ground. Hamas trains terrorists on Malaysian soil with the full knowledge of the Malaysian authorities. Hamas terrorists are recruited and sent to Malaysia for weeklong parachute training, in preparation for cross-border kidnapping attacks in Israel. The support provided by a Security Council member to a terrorist organization is an obstacle to the resumption of our peace negotiations and to the improvement of the lives of those whom Malaysia claims to care about.

The President: The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia): The representative of Israel has chosen to give us a most melodramatic finale in which he opened fire on just about everybody. It is ironic that the representative of Israel can stand here and give all of us a lecture on the protection of civilians in time of war. Israel has written the book on killing civilians in warfare. Israel is the ultimate authority in that area, having murdered thousands of Palestinians just one year ago in Gaza.

Now the latest version of Israel's protection of human rights is to defend the rights of criminals. I say to the representative of Israel that if my country executes criminals, his country is deliberately killing innocent civilians — children, women and men, day and night, and has been doing that for a very long time. I think that it is high time for the Council to put an end to Israeli arrogance and double standards and to ensure that Israel complies with the rules of the civilized community of nations and ceases its occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon.

The President: The representative of Malaysia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): Malaysia is taking the floor to exercise its right of reply to the comments and allegations made by the representative of Israel.

I would first categorically reject the allegation against my country made by the representative of Israel. This is a malicious allegation aimed at tarnishing my country's image. Such allegations have been made before, and my Government has categorically rejected any such ridiculous notion.

Our commitment to countering terrorism is not the issue here. It is, rather, Israel's practice of terrorizing helpless and defenceless Palestinian civilians that is the issue now. I should also reiterate that Malaysia is not an occupying Power, unlike Israel, which is roundly condemned for its illegal practices related to its ongoing occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories.

My delegation's position on the matter under consideration has been made clear in our statement

delivered today. We would urge the Israeli delegation to focus its energy on addressing the various concerns raised by Malaysia and other Member States today, instead of attempting to divert attention with false allegations.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. Please note that I will be limiting further statements to one more per delegation. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): I will be very brief. In reply to the statement of representative of Saudi Arabia made just now, there is a phrase in Arabic that says, "words are cheap" or "you can say whatever you want" — with full impunity, let us say. I think that the representative of Saudi Arabia proved right now, in talking about the protection of civilians and double standards, and earlier, about commissions of inquiry, that this Arabic phrase is very valid with respect to his cynical argumentation.

The President: There are no more speakers inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.